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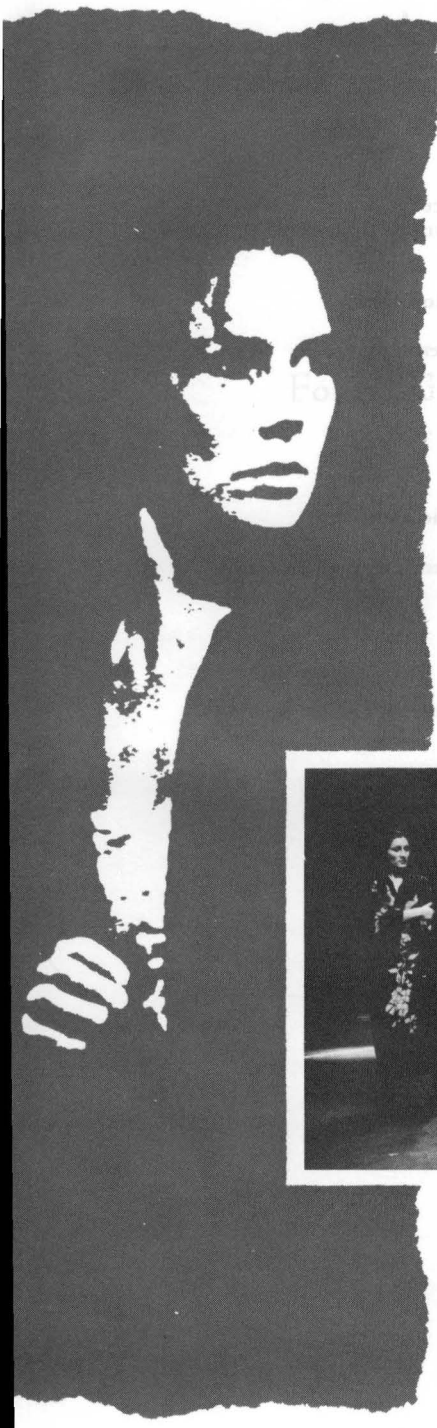
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE



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For Jill Greenhalgh

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Introduction

In normal scientific practice, experiments are conducted, and then the findings are documented and written up in a proper form. The experiment is thus perceived with hindsight, and the results can be assessed from a discreet distance and, if necessary, compared with other similar experiments undertaken elsewhere.

This book is an account of an experiment, but contrary to normal scientific practice, it has been written while the experiment is still in progress. The results are not yet known and are unlikely to be clearly assessable in any case. For the Magdalena Project, as the experiment has come to be known, is a complex network of ongoing research initiatives into that most understudied and underdeveloped area: women's theatre.

In the past twenty years or so, since the rebirth of international women's movements in the 1960s, thousands of women writers, artists, film-makers, theatre practitioners and other creative artists have emerged into the public gaze. A new methodology, loosely termed feminist criticism, has compelled us all to rethink our notion of the great Canon, the list of great works deemed worthy of respect, a list which has traditionally excluded or marginalised women.

Vast numbers of previously unknown and forgotten women have been recovered from the past and are now being read and recognised. The dominance of women playwrights in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century English theatre has at last been noted; the long list of women poets and novelists writing under their own names, with no male pseudonyms required, has amazed us all. Art historians have uncovered a lost history of women painters and sculptors; historians of science have brought back the names of women whose contribution to knowledge was as great as that of any

man. And this process of rediscovery has been matched by a flowering of creativity by women in the latter part of the twentieth century. Suddenly, women are everywhere as creative artists, and perhaps for the first time, questions have been raised about the existence of a women's culture in its own right, something different from that made by men, something new and reflective of the new status that women are just beginning to feel they can have.

In 1949, when Simone de Beauvoir published her book, *The Second Sex*, which was to be such a fundamental text for future generations of feminists, she too was still subscribing to the notion that women's art is necessarily inferior to that of men because of the restricted socio-economic conditions in which women have existed for centuries. Women have been confined to the home, married young, frequently unhappily, forced to bear and rear children and have often lived the lives of slaves to their husbands. Such circumstances, the argument runs, seriously hamper the production of great novels or great paintings, for the world that inspires their art is so restricted. Simone de Beauvoir notes regretfully that there has never been a female Tolstoy and argues that this is because he, as a man, had access to the whole wide world, to battlefields and parliamentary chambers, to the corridors of power and the inner circles of economic shaping, whilst women were nursing babies and tending gardens or, at most, participating in village or community life in some small way.

One of the most exciting ideas to emerge from the new feminist criticism is a conception of women's creativity that challenges the view of Simone de Beauvoir, founder feminist though she may have been. The alternative vision suggests that the breadth and range of life experiences has little or nothing to do with producing great art, and that the core of the problem lies not with the restrictions women have so obviously suffered but with the arbiters of taste and greatness, those persons who determine what is and is not great art and who have always been men.

Adrienne Rich sums up the problem in a nutshell:

> in pretending to stand for 'the human', masculine subjectivity
> tries to force us to name our truths in an alien language, to
> dilute them; we are constantly told that the 'real' problems . . .
> are those men have defined, that the problems we need to
> examine are trivial, unscholarly, non-existent . . . Any woman
> who has moved from the playing fields of male discourse into

> the realm where women are developing our own descriptions of
> the world knows the extraordinary sense of shedding . . .
> someone else's baggage.[1]

The image of 'shedding', of losing the burden of a borrowed skin, a borrowed language, has been prominent in the work of numerous feminist creators. Verena Stefan, in her book entitled *Shedding* (*Häutungen*), depicts a new woman, a new being emerging from the weight of the past by asking questions and listening to her own inner feelings for the first time:

> We constantly
> come up against
> limits in our explorations. The limits
> of our own strength of available time of
> economic resources, of our careers and
> our longings. When can we
> clarify what longings really are? How can we make
> room for our sensual life? The new
> emerges but slowly, shedding the old, patchwork.[2]

Both Adrienne Rich and Verena Stefan, American and European, two roughly contemporary women writing independently of one another on either side of the Atlantic Ocean, reject a view of the world that seeks to place women's creative achievements in a lower position, and in doing so they reject the concept of the great Canon of literature, the process of evaluation that has gone on for so long, and call for a new aesthetic, a women's aesthetic. Quite what that may be they do not say, only that if it comes, it will come from within women, from a recognition of what it means to be a woman.

This great difference in attitude separates Simone de Beauvoir from her successors. For Rich and Stefan offer an alternative to the frightening statement in *The Second Sex* that 'as long as [woman] has to struggle to become a human being, she cannot become a creator.'[3] They suggest that what has to evolve is a new process, an alternative form of creativity. The starting point, the only starting point, has to be within the consciousness of the individual woman, and the question of whether what she produces will be great art or not is entirely irrelevant; that is a male question posed in male terms. The notion of a woman's creativity is not new; there are many examples of women

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who have reflected on the idea of an alternative art, one that would be truly feminine and not derived from male traditions. Writing to Virginia Woolf in 1935 Victoria Ocampo, the Argentinian writer, says:

> My sole ambition is to one day write more or less well, more or less badly, but like a *woman*. If I could have a magic lamp like Aladdin and, by rubbing it, could have the power to write like Shakespeare, Dante, Goethe, Cervantes, or Dostoyevsky, I truly would not take advantage of it. Because I believe that a woman cannot unburden herself of her thoughts and feelings in a man's style, just as she cannot speak with a man's voice.[4]

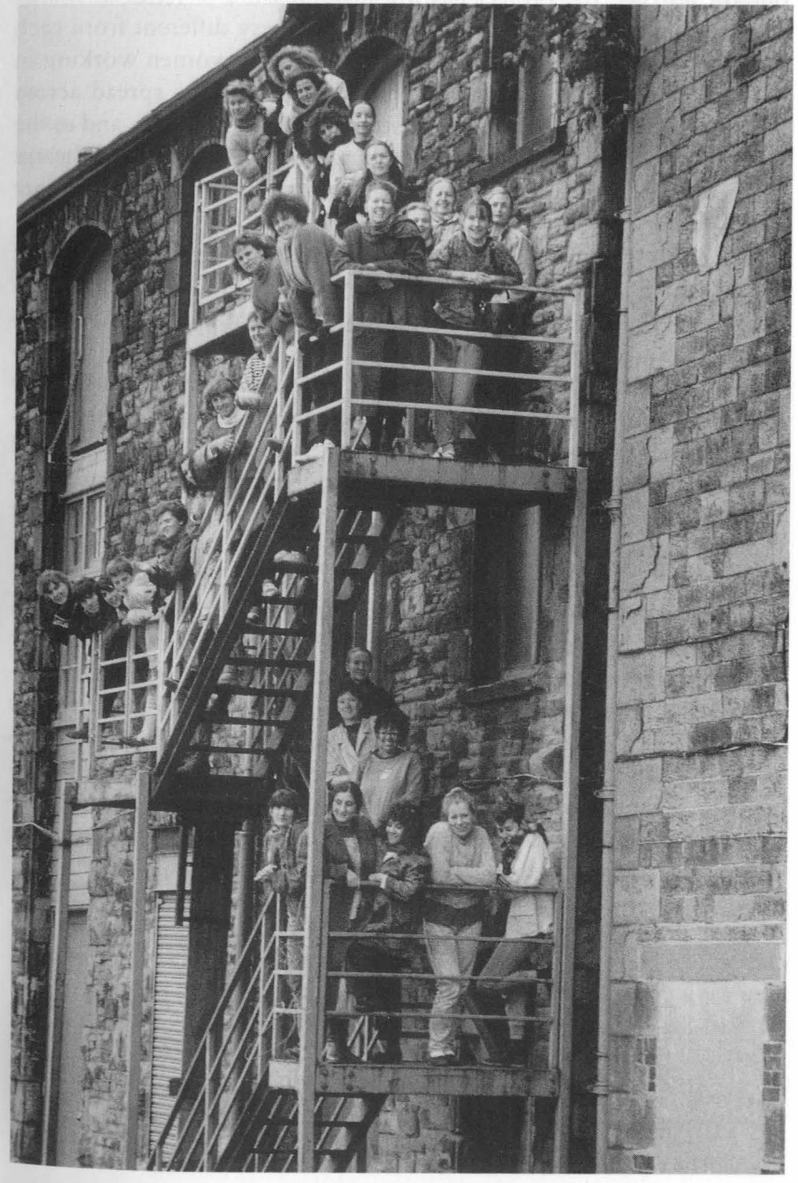
Forty years later the French feminist writer, Hélène Cixous, echoed Victoria Ocampo's desire for something new, for something truly belonging to women. In an essay entitled 'Le rire de la meduse' (The Laugh of the Medusa), she tries to describe the frustrations of wanting to create, of beginning to be in touch with something deep and personal and new but of not quite managing to let it out:

> Time and again, I, too, have felt so full of luminous torrents that I could burst – burst with forms much more beautiful than those which are put up in frames and sold for a stinking fortune. And I, too, said nothing, showed nothing; I didn't open my mouth, I didn't repaint my half of the world. I was ashamed. I was afraid, and I swallowed my shame and my fear. I said to myself: You are mad. What's the meaning of these waves, these floods, these outbursts?[5]

In asking herself such questions, Cixous maintains that like so many other women, she argues herself out of creativity. How many women have been ashamed of their own strength, she asks, or have been horrified by the violence of their energy, having been led to believe that women ought always to be calm and composed and self-effacing? 'Who, feeling a funny desire stirring inside her (to sing, to write, to dare to speak, in short, to bring out something new), hasn't thought she was sick?'[6]

Feminist thinking has opened up these issues. Like the box that Pandora is supposed to have opened, releasing sin into the world, feminism has subverted our traditional notions of art and aesthetic

judgement. There are new forces unleashed in the world; old skins are being shed every day.



1. The Magdalena '86 team at the Potato Factory

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The Magdalena Project, from its beginning, has been an attempt to slough off old preconceptions about women in theatre and make new statements that can lead into new areas. Originally conceived as a one-off festival, the Project has mushroomed into a series of workshops, conferences and performances, often very different from each other, but all trying to explore ways forward for women working in the theatre. From its origins in Cardiff in 1986 it has spread across Europe and over the Atlantic to North and South America, and in the process of growth it has also shifted focus, from experimental theatre in the first instance to all forms of theatre in which women are involved.

Although it is still far too early to form any critical assessment of the Magdalena Project, some of its more obvious successes and failures can be seen, and this book looks at what has taken place so far and what is planned for the future. The voices of many women involved in Magdalena can be heard, some enthusiastic and some very negative – the quotations are taken from original letters, tapes and recorded statements. The vision of Jill Greenhalgh, the original founder of Magdalena, involves a belief in the uniqueness of women's creativity, although she admits that as yet she cannot articulate what it is that she is striving for. Some women share her vision, but others have been more critical, rejecting what they perceive as woolly idealism in favour of a theatre practice that has its roots in social need and real experience. The Magdalena Project is therefore a forum for debate among women, and although participants may share a common belief in the value of women's work in theatre, they often share very little else. The violence and energy described by Hélène Cixous as part of woman's struggle to release her own creative potential has been a constant feature of the Magdalena encounters. As the Magdalena Project extends its programme of events forward through the 1990s, the struggle seems likely to go on and on.

Notes

1. Adrienne Rich, 'Conditions for Work: The Common World of Women,' *Heresies*, 3 (1977), pp. 53–4.

2. Verena Stefan, *Shedding*, trans. Johanna Moore and Beth Weckmüller (London, The Women's Press, 1978), p. 108.

3. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1974).

4. Victoria Ocampo, 'Carta a Virginia Woolf,' in D. Meyer, *Victoria Ocampo* (New York, Braziller, 1979), p. 127.

5. Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa,' in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds, *New French Feminisms* (Brighton, Harvester, 1981), pp. 245–64.

6. Ibid.

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I
The Birth of Magdalena

Women's Theatre Past and Present

Despite the large amount of work published on women's creativity in general and women's writing in particular, the theatre has received little attention. This seems curious at first glance, given the long history of women's involvement with theatre and the public attention focused on female performers, but it is nevertheless true. Not only has contemporary work by women in theatre received scant attention, but very little has been written on women's theatre history, a fact which leads to the continuance of all kinds of misconceptions and wrong assumptions about that history, principal of which is the belief that actresses were a late arrival to the scene, in the seventeenth century, and that there have rarely, if ever, been any women involved in management and production. In 1931 Rosamond Gilder published *Enter the Actress. The First Women in the Theatre*,[1] and despite the publication of studies of individual aspects of women's theatre history, her book is still the only one we have that tackles the question on a large scale. Yet without an awareness of history, it is impossible to discover the origins of prejudices still operating against women, the best defence against which must surely be adequate information and knowledge.

The role of women in theatre management, for example, is an important one and deserves to be fully explored, but the role of woman as actress also needs reassessment. Contrary to popular belief, women players were an integral part of theatrical performances for centuries. When Isabella Andreini, the Italian *commedia dell'arte* player (who also wrote texts), died in 1604 aged forty-two, pregnant and still touring with the company in Lyons, the whole city attended her majestic funeral. Yet across the Channel in Shakespeare's London, women's roles were being played by young men, it

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being deemed offensive for women to appear on a stage. The history of theatre has remembered the prohibition of women from the London stages; it has forgotten the European-wide success of actresses in the *commedia* companies.

Scholars generally agree that the earliest dramatic dialogue in Western theatre history after the decline of the Roman Empire is the *Quem Quaeritis* trope which dates from the latter part of the tenth century. Theatre, we are told, vanished with the collapse of the Roman tradition and appeared again in churches through the dramatisation of crucially significant moments in the Mass. But in the late fifteenth century a German scholar discovered a manuscript of plays, religious comedies in the manner of the Roman playwright Terence, written at the same time as the *Quem Quaeritis*. What perplexed him, and has perplexed scholars ever since, is that the plays were written by a woman named Hrostvitha, a nun in the prestigious convent of Gandersheim in Saxony. Controversy has continued to rage about Hrostvitha's plays: could they really have been written by a nun, in view of the often scurrilous sense of humour and wit displayed in them, and if they were written by her, who performed them? Could nuns in a tenth-century German convent have performed plays? And if they did, for whom did they perform, and most problematic of all, if one convent was engaged in the writing and production of plays, how did this come to be? Was it an aberration, or was there a tradition of similar activity, something that centuries of scholarship managed to overlook, because it was always looking for theatre produced by men, never for theatre made by women?

Many of the apparent inconsistencies in women's theatre history can be explained by the poor state of scholarship in theatre studies, which is itself, after all, a fairly new discipline. Much work in theatre studies has tended to focus on the text, on the actual script of the play that was performed by the actors, and this is perhaps understandable, since theatre is an ephemeral art, and the written text is often all that remains. But emphasis on the written text creates an imbalance; in the history of performance prior to the Renaissance, for example, it is very clear that the actor, performing a scenario or play, was one of a much wider group of dancers, singers, musicians, jugglers and artistes of all kinds. The act of 1572 for the punishment of vagabonds, passed during the reign of Elizabeth I in England, divided performers into categories. Those who belonged to a formally constituted company and had a legal patron were acceptable to the law. Those

2. Brigitte Cirla discussing her training session at Magdalena '86

who could 'gyve no reckninge how hee or shee dothe lawfullye get his or her Lyving' were to 'bee taken adjudged and deemed Roges Vacaboundes and Sturdy Beggers'.[2] Into this category came fencers, bear-keepers, common players in interludes, minstrels, jugglers, pedlars, tinkers and travelling salesmen or chapmen. The theatre world was divided into the acceptable and the outsiders, and women performers were well and truly outside the homophilic courtly circles of Elizabethan theatre.

In Italy, the process of commercialisation of the *commedia* companies also led to radical changes in structure and resulted in a less prominent place for female performers. But more seriously, at the same time as theatre was being established on a commercial basis in sixteenth-century Europe, there was also a radical shift in ideology and in perception. The Reformation had spread throughout Northern Europe and was being met head on by the conservatism of the Counter-Reformation. In both these world views, the role of women was circumscribed and determined by a rigid moral code. The

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literary women of the High Renaissance and the age of Humanism vanished and were not replaced. The emergent middle classes saw little reason to educate their daughters, unlike the Renaissance barons and theologians. And in the new moral climate, women exposing themselves to public gaze became synonymous with whores. The actress, reintroduced into England in the licentious ambiance of the court of Charles II, was an object of male desire, a prey, a thing to be bought and sold. She was also, of course, good box-office material, and female sexuality was there for the exploitation. The pit, former home of Shakespeare's groundlings, became the best place in the house and consequently the most expensive, once it was realised that the occupants of front row seats could look directly up the actresses' skirts in an age when they wore no knickers.

The process of rediscovering the history of women in the theatre has barely begun, but as it starts to happen it is bound to affect present work. Certainly, from the 1960s onwards women throughout the world have felt a need to create something they could define as 'women's theatre', and since traditions and history appeared to be absent, women have set about creating that theatre on their own terms. Describing her work with the Women's Experimental Theatre in New York, Roberta Sklar, one of the artistic directors, tries to explain some of the problems of finding a voice in the theatre for women:

> I was interested in developing a theatre, a method and a theory. How do you act as a performer and a person when you have been taught not to ACT, not to do, not to take action? The performer is taking an action. The study of acting is an analysis of human behaviour and a projection of that analysis. Once I realized that, I knew that I had to rediscover or reanalyze even the things I had been part of inventing at the Open Theatre, because these inventions were made from a male-identified perspective. Now I needed other voices.[3]

Wrestling with these problems in the late 1960s, Roberta Sklar claims that she began to see a way forward after first watching a feminist company, the It's Alright to be A Woman Theatre, perform in 1971. Though theatrically naive, the performance provided an example of a new role for theatre, one in which performers and audience could act in partnership and share in consciousness.

Early feminist theatre in the late 1960s and early 1970s was, as Roberta Sklar suggests, exciting, new and very simplistic. Essentially agit-prop theatre, small companies toured shows through Britain, North America and Europe, drawing attention to the new demands being made by women for improved working conditions and equal pay, freedom from violence, abortion and child-care facilities, divorce, equal rights and equal status with men. The terminology of Women's Liberation united both performers and audiences, and this kind of theatre had a clear function as both consciousness-raising and supportive. In Rome the first women's theatre was established, La Maddalena, coincidentally drawing on the same name that would be used fifteen years later when the Magdalena Project was devised.

In her book, *Carry on, Understudies* (1986), Michelene Wandor discusses the way in which women's theatre in Britain developed over two decades. She divides the work into several phases: phase one is the street-theatre phase, when feminist theatre was essentially a political theatre, a theatre of the barricades, which she locates between 1969 and 1973. The second phase, a more complex organisational phase, she locates between 1973 and 1977, and during this period she sees feminist theatre as becoming more complex and theatrically more sophisticated. The third phase, from 1977 to the early 1980s, is the period in which a small but increasing number of women began to move into mainstream theatre, into positions as directors, managers and playwrights:

> The vivid visual imagery of the early street theatre, with its spontaneity and its attack on stereotypical 'feminine' imagery gave way in the mid-1970s to a period of consolidation and the development of a theatre of argument, a theatre which explored what it would mean to reclaim the experience of women and gays from the militant sexual–political perspective of the period. . . . The third phase towards the end of the 1970s showed a return to some of the early spontaneity, but now in a different context . . . the new spontaneity revolved around an examination of the way the theatrical forms themselves work to represent sexuality.[4]

Though applied to the British theatre only, Michelene Wandor's divisions into phases roughly correspond to the stages of development in women's theatre elsewhere. The first period was clearly more of a

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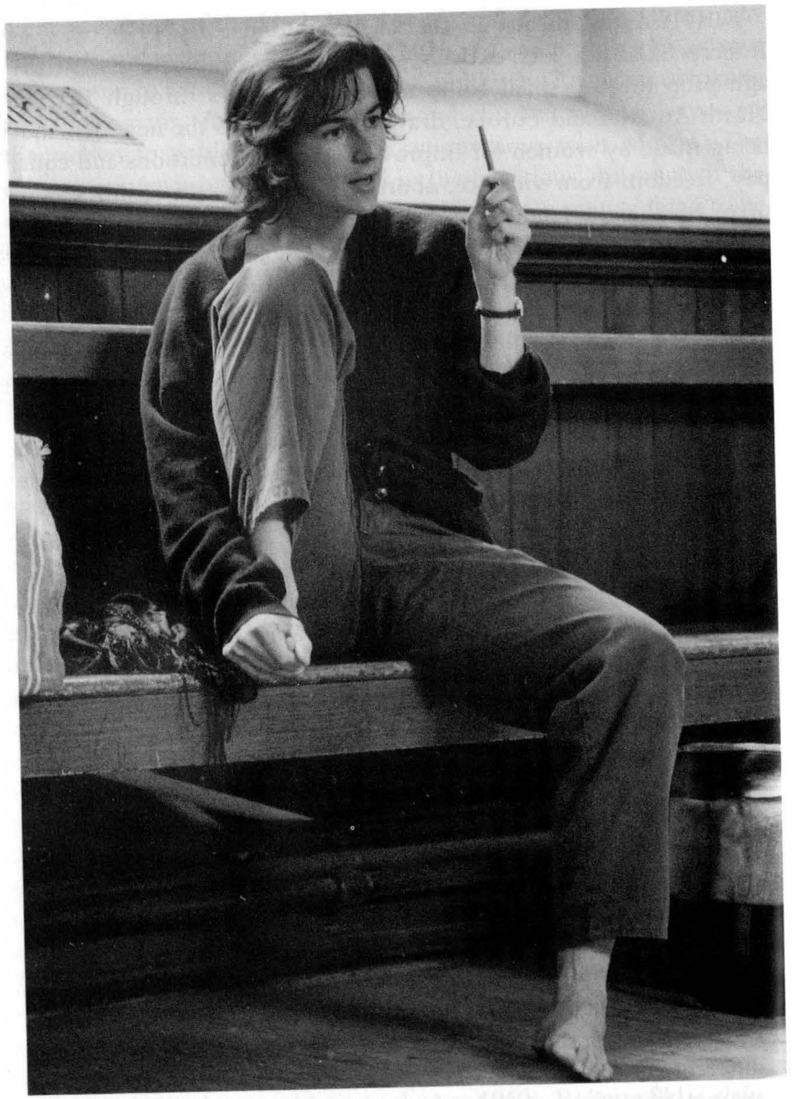

3. *Maria Consagra directing her workshop at Magdalena '86*

naive, propagandist phase for the women's cause, characterised by great energy and enthusiasm. The second phase, which occurred rather later in Britain (it had already begun to happen some four or five years earlier in North America, for example) saw women beginning to deal with the historical problem of their exclusion from the

power machinery of theatre production, and therefore moved beyond the straightforward depiction of stage images of women's condition. In this second, organisational phase, all kinds of issues were addressed: the marginalisation of women from positions in management, the need for genuinely cooperative company structures that did not place the technical work in a lower category, the question of whether a director was necessary in a cooperative structure and if so, what the role of a woman director with an alternative notion of power hierarchies might be, the problem faced by women (in touring companies particularly) of child care and the collective responsibilities of the company for the provision of that child care. These issues were among the many that began to enter into the discussions surrounding the development of a specifically 'women's theatre'.

The movement of women into mainstream theatre, though obviously significant, marks one of the ways in which feminism has changed with the changing times. Although it is important for women to work in national theatre companies and to direct large-scale, prestigious companies, such work does not fall within the scope of this book, nor does the increasing amount of work being produced by women playwrights, particularly in Britain, since this kind of theatre work, interesting and valuable though it may be, is rarely experimental. The presence of one or two women directors in the Royal Shakespeare Company, for example, does not radically alter the kind of theatre produced by that company, and certainly does not take women's theatre very far forward, even though all women working within the theatre will note with a small degree of satisfaction the breaching of yet another bastion of male culture. The Magdalena Project starts with a different kind of theatre, a theatre that stands in relation to contemporary National Theatres in much the same way as the jugglers, minstrels and sturdy beggars stood in relation to the liveried players of courtly companies in the sixteenth century.

Third Theatre – The Women's Story

Michelene Wandor's second phase of the British feminist theatre ends in 1977, and that year was also significant in other countries. In Italy, where there had been a huge ferment of alternative theatre companies and feminist creative work since the early 1970s, 1977 marked a watershed year in national politics. It was the year of the 'historic

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compromise', the accord between the parties of the centre-right and the Communist Party, traditionally the largest communist party outside Eastern Europe. The 'historic compromise' was seen by many as a great betrayal on the part of the Italian Left, and repercussions were felt immediately in the world of theatre and writing. With the Left prepared publicly to do business with the old forces of opposition, the role of an alternative theatre became more questionable, particularly since subsidies for small companies had come primarily from parties on the Left. The historic compromise caused a crisis of confidence.

In Britain, that crisis was becoming daily more evident and resulted in a shift to the right in 1979 with the first of three successive Conservative election victories. In France, the rise of the far right and the Neo-Nazis, with all the paraphernalia of male militaristic ritual, brought all kinds of skeletons out of the cupboard, and in West Germany a similar process was under way. The latter part of the 1970s throughout Europe and North America, which saw Ronald Reagan elected to power in 1980, was characterised by a move to the right, and the cultural policies of right-wing governments firmly exclude small, alternative theatre companies, which do not have international status or appeal and which all too often tend to be sharply critical of society.

It would not be unfair, therefore, to see 1977 as the end of the Age of Alternative Theatre that had lasted some fifteen years and provided such vital stimulus to the development of a new women's theatre. But even as that age came to an end, other things were happening that offered a more hopeful prospect for the future. The Jamaican women's theatre collective, Sistren, was founded in 1977, a group of working-class women on a government-sponsored emergency employment programme. Women's alternative theatre may have been in trouble in the industrialised world, but in the Third World it was just beginning, and increasingly the theatre work that was taking place outside Europe and North America came to be a source of energy and inspiration for theatre practitioners who felt constrained by the cultural backwardness of the new right.

In Belgrade in 1976 the first encounter of Third Theatre was held, and Eugenio Barba, founder of the Odin Theatre which has been a powerful force in helping to shape the work of many alternative theatre practitioners in the 1970s, wrote a short document that later came to be seen as a Manifesto for Third Theatre. In this document he

4. Kozana Lucca demonstrating Beauty's voice at Magdalena '86

tried to explain the choice of the term 'Third Theatre' and to explain what it was that characterised this kind of work. On the one hand, he argued, was the official, subsidised, institutionalised theatre, and on the other hand the theatre of the avant-garde, always searching for

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new ways forward. Somewhere between the two exists a vast, amorphous group of people who spend their lives trying to make theatre, often with no formal qualifications other than their own enthusiasm and determination:

> The Third Theatre lives on the fringe, often outside or on the outskirts of the centers and capitals of culture. It is a theatre created by people who define themselves as actors, directors, theatre workers, although they have seldom undergone a traditional theatrical education and are therefore not recognized as professionals. But they are not amateurs. Their entire day is filled with theatrical experience, sometimes by what they call training, or by the preparation of performances for which they must fight to find an audience . . . Like islands without contact between themselves, young people in Europe, North and South America, Australia and Japan gather to form theatre groups, determined to survive.[5]

Eugenio Barba's list of islands has since expanded to include India, Africa, the Caribbean and the South Pacific, but the initial principle is clear. He had identified a new phenomenon, one for which he chose the appropriate metaphor of floating islands, that of a collective turning to theatre not as a profession but as a way of life.

The great hopes of the 1960s had turned sour a decade later, with the growing power of reactionary forces, and the generation that had devised picket-line theatre, guerrilla theatre, and the Happening began to change direction and to look for new modes of expression. The expansion of feminism, in the meantime, with its emphasis on alternative social structures and alternative modes of perception, meant that women were in the vanguard of the search for new forms of theatre.

By the end of the 1970s, therefore, there were three distinct lines of development in women's theatre work: propagandist theatre still continued, but in a very diminished form and with little artistic potential; women were moving in substantial numbers into mainstream theatre and into television especially, and finally, in the floating islands of theatre communities, women were beginning to come to the fore, devising all-women shows, taking major organisational roles and, above all, testing the power and potential of women for a future, as yet unknown, theatre.

Mary Magdalene – The Archetypal Performer

Travelling round Europe, working in different Third Theatre companies, Jill Greenhalgh, the woman who devised the Magdalena Project in the first place, was struck by the energy of many of the women she encountered in contrast to their male counterparts. The general sense of disquiet at the narrowing of the political spectrum was experienced by both sexes, but it was in the work of women that Jill Greenhalgh found a greater sense of hopefulness and determination. The idea began to germinate for a meeting point that would bring together women from a wide variety of theatre backgrounds and many different cultures to share their experiences and compare notes. The history of individual women would also, she felt, have an impact on other women, and they would be able to compare notes on how they had dealt with discrimination, how they collaborated with their companies, how their work was received. Most significantly, they would be able to share their practical work, through training sessions and demonstrations. The idea for a festival of women's experimental theatre began to germinate, and the first stage of the Magdalena Project was under way.

Jill Greenhalgh describes how that first phase took place:

> Magdalena '86 – International Festival of Women in Experimental Theatre was born at a cafe table by Lake Bracciano near Rome at the international theatre festival *Il Segreto di Alice* in 1984. This festival brought over 100 practitioners from the Third Theatre family together to perform their shows and make special events. It was a lovely sunny crazy gathering. The village was delighted to have us, and we celebrated our knowing of each other. There were many reunions, love affairs, much eating and drinking together and an enormous amount of work. The events we made were huge joyful occasions enjoyed over 10 days by thousands of Italians. However, underlying this apparent strength and energy was the feeling of being at some kind of fantastic wake.

Many of the independent theatre groups that had grown up through the 70s and early 80s had reached a crossroads and were unconfident about which road to take next. It was as though there was a drought and the search for fresh water had its effect in a certain amount of disillusionment. In many cases it was

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apparent that individuals were leaving the companies they had worked with for many years. This disintegration clearly indicated the need for change and the digging of new wells of inspiration . . .

In the cafe we thought how fine it could be if all the women from the groups could come together to meet and to work for a while . . . what an extraordinary energy that would create . . . and the drinking and dancing continued. Then the festival ended. The groups went on their separate tours with their separate work.[6]

One of the reasons why feminism had made so much progress in such a short time is that the ideas in circulation within the differently developing women's movements were shared by so many women from so many different societies. The remarkable advances of feminist thought in a brief twenty-year period certainly suggest that such a phenomenon as *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of an age, exists. Jill Greenhalgh's idea for bringing together women in theatre to share their experiences coincided with similar ideas already in circulation, and consequently an organisational committee came together very quickly, based in the Cardiff Laboratory Theatre.

Working with an ensemble company in the Cardiff Laboratory Theatre, Jill Greenhalgh had been involved in a performance called *The Heart of the Mirror*. The performance was difficult to create and painful for the performers, since it involved them in dealing with traumatic issues concerning the oppression of women, the abuse of women through pornography and the destructive force of patriarchal morals and ethics. The performance was, for many of those involved, a watershed, and for Jill Greenhalgh and Helen Chadwick especially, it was a further testament to the need for an articulation of women's culture, since in devising the production they had been shocked by the history of silence that surrounds women. As Jill Greenhalgh put it, 'I stayed with the Cardiff Lab determined to use our resources to create a situation in which women could find a voice, to tell of a female experience. A voice that would be heard . . . a place where feminine culture could be celebrated and where women's distinctive creativity would be recognized.'[7] The idea of a festival returned.

The initial support group, intent on creating the means whereby a women's theatre festival could take place, changed several times in the early stages due to pressures of work that meant moving from the

Cardiff base, but plans began to materialise, and in 1985 a small-scale project was devised that would serve as a pilot for the much larger festival planned for 1986.

At some stage in the deliberations the name 'Magdalena' emerged. No one is quite certain who first thought of it, or when, but the name appealed and was accepted by the group. Nobody knew that it was also the name chosen earlier by the Rome women's theatre; coincidentally two entirely separate ventures involving women in theatre had chosen the same symbolic name, that of Mary Magdalene.

According to tradition, Mary Magdalene was a performer, a woman whose body was her greatest talent. The old equation of performer–whore has as its archetype the figure of Mary Magdalene, the fallen woman who danced and sang in exchange for money, until converted and redeemed by the coming of Christ. Mary Magdalene has been depicted by generations of male artists, always beautiful, with long flowing hair and graceful limbs but without the diabolic quality that appears so often in representations of that other archetypal performer, Salome. Feminist representations of Mary Magdalene, however, have presented a different image. Marguerite Yourcenar, in her story of the betrayal of Mary Magdalene by her husband, John the Baptist (the same man whose death was the price of Salome's performance), depicts her as a victim of the male God, denied happiness and fulfilment and condemned to serve a patriarchal plan.[8] Other representations stress the independent spirit of Mary Magdalene, the woman alone surviving in a man's world, a very different image from that of the languid repentant sinner, offering herself on her knees to her saviour. Because of the ambiguities surrounding the image of Mary Magdalene, because of her history as a performer, because of the ambiguities surrounding the image of woman as performer in general, the name Magdalene seemed appropriate and was adopted.

The Captive Waves

In July 1985 Cardiff Laboratory Theatre supported a pilot project for the Magdalena Festival. The Captive Waves project brought together six professional women theatre practitioners and musicians from different backgrounds, with the aim of exploring new working methods without the pressure of touring commitments or producing a final product. It was to be an experimental collaborative project concerned with uncovering hidden symbols of feminine culture. It

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was not concerned with creating narrative but rather with creating a resonant atmosphere that might touch on the subconscious of an audience.

Sandra Salmaso, an Italian actress, Ali Robinson and Charlotte Buchanan, both classical musicians, Kari Furre, a well-established theatre designer and Jill Greenhalgh as director made up the company. (Claire Hughes, an English actress, was involved in the early stages but due to a serious illness was unable to complete the project.) There were only five weeks in which to complete the project, and as the group was completely new and one member spoke no English, it was a challenge to remain constant to fundamental concerns and not return to known theatrical formats.

The process embarked upon was eclectic. There was no fixed theme and no predetermined direction. It was irrational in the extreme, seeking only to follow an instinctive path. The six members of the company proposed ideas, presented personal material, books were passed around, themes developed, dances and songs were improvised, visual materials were shared. Step by step solid material was created but never with any conscious aim in mind. Common thoughts and images began to emerge, and these became the signposts of the work.

The final piece, therefore, was the result of the collective imagination of two musicians, two actresses, an artist and a director, who facilitated the work and wove together the threads of material. The performance was a fragmented evocation of a young woman's fall into her own conscience. Through a series of dances, songs and sculptural animations she confronts her deep fears and tries to dissect them. The piece spoke of the lies that are inherited and accepted from one's foremothers about who women are and how they should be, and how generation after generation of these lies has formed a protective layer shielding woman from knowledge of herself.

Sandra Salmaso's strong solo performance gave the impression of a woman–child beginning to hack away at these layers in her search for the answers to the plaguing question of her identity. The soundscape was composed and performed by the two musicians on a grand piano, cello, violin, conga drums and various other metallic objects used for percussion purposes. It used special effect amplification causing distortion and echo. The texts, chosen from Sylvia Plath, Phyllis Chestler and Susan Griffin, were both sung and spoken. Kari Furre's set design gave the effect of a cave-like labyrinth, in which

5. Graciella Serra's workshop on Sense Perception at Magdalena '86

painted faces and figures of women appeared to ooze from the hanging walls, being revealed and disappearing as the lighting changed. The primary objects were a white bed, a rocking chair, a grossly ugly doll, a typewriter, many red-bound diaries, a pitcher and shattered mirror pieces suggesting a waterfall.

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The work was shown over three nights, once to all women, once to all men and then to a mixed audience. Discussions that sought immediate reactions and feelings rather than opinions followed each performance. The audience of women spoke of feeling a recognition but were unwilling to articulate that feeling. That discussion was short but encouraging. The all-male audience shocked the performers by indulging in a two-hour series of dogmatic arguments among themselves, that bore little or no relation to the work they had seen, which eventually resulted in two or three men making angry recriminations against their own sex and the inability, in this forum, to genuinely speak of the work they had been shown. The mixed audience took the opportunity to question each other and analyse their collective reaction. The three types of audience therefore produced three *very* different reactions, and this fact in itself deserves further attention in similar future experiments.

The Captive Waves was an important pilot experiment for the Magdalena Project, since the sources that it revealed inspired much of the thinking behind the construction of the larger festival project. The aim remained that of looking for a process that might uncover and theatrically present signs that had some common female meaning, rather than distorting what was seen as the truth of woman's experience to fit the existent symbolism of male culture. It was a simple theatrical experiment allowing for a practical rather than a theoretical exploration. As Nor Hall in her book *The Moon and the Virgin* puts it:

> Essential to the task of finding out for oneself is the willingness to engage in, or be engaged by, a process of reflection and fabrication – of seeing and making. . . . The woman who can bend enough to go from reflecting to fabricating will be the one who can make up for something that is missing in the world. She is the one who can give shape to things lying beneath the surface . . .[9]

Belief in the shapeless but potentially powerful force of women's creativity was therefore fundamental to the Captive Waves project, as it would be later to the first Magdalena meetings. Reactions among the participants of Captive Waves were positive, with the women struggling to articulate what they felt had happened to them. In all

their comments there is a sense of bewilderment, combined with a sense of excitement about what has begun to take shape.

> FLOW: A word that has been on my mind, for, after three days, I began to feel a strange energy in the air – a sensorial current of creative energy.
>
> How was it possible to work without knowing anyone or speaking the language common to all – English? The degrees of perception, reception, understanding and of 'listening' to one another was absolutely new to me, strong . . . strangely tangible . . . even to the degree of divergent opinions.
>
> And what was behind all this? Was it because we were all women, with strength in a group, or was it the combination of personalities which got along together so well? I think, but I am still unsure, that it was our disposition, the attitude we all came here with. Open, responsible, ready to take risks . . . perhaps it was our dialectical attitude? It has been the 'first time' for each of us.
>
> *Sandra Salmaso* (translation Katy Dymoke)

Theatre design is an interpretive art concerned usually with presenting the writer's and director's visions. An artist, however, has a responsibility to comment and respond to her own vision. The working process for Captive Waves has attempted to present a collective vision.

As designer, I have experienced no 'power struggle' problems with the director, the problem being rather to avoid imposing *my* will on the performers.

Working on a project for women has not allowed me to take refuge in 'known' and 'safe' methods of work – rather I was able and free to express self-doubt and inadequacy without being judged. I have functioned as an artist but with shared responsibility for the vision and, ideally, should like to work in this way again.

Kari Furre

The relationship of sister to sister is a unique and complex mixture of intense competitiveness, irritation, even hatred,

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coupled with deep understanding. Indiscriminately calling our women friends our sisters belittles the intensity of these emotions and the repercussions they have in our adult relationships.

If we six really were sisters, we mightn't have made this piece.

Ali Robinson

We shared in a process which opened to question any conceptions of sisterhood we have had. The ups and downs brought out 'captive waves' in all of us. From the outside I feel we have touched on a universal female consciousness that is sadly so soon silenced, clouded or denied in a male-dominated profession and world. The showing of the work so far shows the strength and potentialities of an alternative process. We can only go forward.

Katy Dymoke[10]

The voices are optimistic, but guarded. What seems clear is that all believed in the possibility of discovering an authentic women's voice, and they shared a further belief in the existence of some kind of transcultural female consciousness. This conviction inspired them to continue with the larger, more ambitious Magdalena Festival a year later.

Notes

1. Rosamond Gilder, *Enter the Actress. The First Women in the Theatre* (London, Harrap, 1931).

2. Quoted in Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage 1574–1642* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 19.

3. Roberta Sklar, quoted in Cornelia Brunner, 'Roberta Sklar: Toward Creating a Women's Theatre,' *The Drama Review*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (June 1980), pp. 23–41.

4. Michelene Wandor, *Carry On, Understudies* (London, Routledge, 1986), p. 87.

5. Eugenio Barba, *Beyond the Floating Islands* (New York, PAJ Publications, 1985), p. 193.

6. Jill Greenhalgh, letter to the author, undated.

7. Ibid.

8. Marguerite Yourcenar, 'Marie-Madeleine ou le Salut,' in *Feux* (Paris, Gallimard, 1974), pp. 113–35.

9. Nor Hall, *The Moon and the Virgin* (London, The Women's Press, 1981).

10. All quotations are from the report on Captive Waves, a privately circulated document addressed to Jill Greenhalgh.

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II
Magdalena '86: The First Meeting

Planning the Festival

In August 1986, the first international festival of women in experimental theatre, known as Magdalena '86, took place in Cardiff, supported by the Cardiff Laboratory Theatre, the Welsh Arts Council and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. The festival lasted for three weeks, from 11 to 30 August, with a programme of training workshops, performances, discussions and a concluding collaborative performance staged in an old factory down by the docks on two consecutive nights.

From the outset, the organisers of Magdalena were acutely aware that mounting an international festival of the work of women in experimental theatre carried huge responsibilities. They wanted the festival to be big, in order to make a significant impact on the theatre world, and they wanted to show a quality cross-section of exciting new work by women. This required complex, professional organisation and a high degree of personal commitment. Facing up to the realities of the situation, the organisers accepted that to find funding to support such a huge experiment seemed an unrealistic possibility with the limited resources and experience of the committee. So from the outset, it was accepted that the first festival was likely to be both underfunded and time-consuming, requiring the unremunerated, committed energy of all those involved in the process of making Magdalena '86 viable.

Magdalena '86 was the first festival of its kind in Europe. As a project of the Cardiff Laboratory Theatre it continued to promote their policy of exposing the work of foreign artists and groups to audiences in Wales, and was the first multi-cultural event hosted by the 12-year-old company. It was also their first major all-women project.

The budget was minimal. Grants of £9000 from the Welsh Arts Council and £6000 from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation supported the essential skeleton of the organisation, allowing basic wages for the small team of organisers, funds for a publicity campaign, administration and documentation costs. The aim was also to keep the charges for admission to performances and workshops during the first week as low as possible, to give the maximum opportunity for as many people as possible to attend.

Food, accommodation and travel within the United Kingdom was offered to all the visiting artists. The women from countries with restricted currencies received a small daily allowance to cover their personal needs. All children were supported in the same way, and in some cases accompanying colleagues were accommodated.

None of the visiting artists, however, were paid a fee for their performances or workshops, nor did they receive money for international travel. The task of raising essential personal money was the responsibility of each practitioner. In many cases, the Magdalena organisation assisted practitioners by lobbying the cultural funding bodies within their respective countries or by applying to foundations representing those countries in Britain. Some performers were supported by the British Council; Netta Plotsky received a travel grant from the Israeli Ministry of Culture and Education; Zofia Kalinska and the Akne Company were funded by Krakow House of Culture, Poland. In some cases, women continued to draw salaries from their respective companies. The director of the 1986 Coventry Festival, Maggie Russell, offered to stage four of the performances for that Festival immediately prior to the start of Magdalena, and the money earned from that source enabled the Argentinians, Graciella Serra and Kozana Lucca, to attend and also assisted other performers.

In some cases, women arranged to take time off to coincide with the dates of Magdalena, in order not to interrupt the touring commitments of their own companies for the rest of the year. In the main, most supported themselves through savings or taking loans. The full complexities of the financial arrangements cannot fully be dealt with here, but attempts were made by the organising committee to evaluate each case according to the personal situation of the practitioner and to respond with whatever financial or administrative support the limited resources could muster.

The decision to go ahead with organising the festival without financial security was perceived critically by some women. Review-

6. Daria Anfelli and Michelle Kramers of Osmega Dnia giving a demonstration of their work at Magdalena '86

ing Magdalena '86 in *Performance* magazine, Mina Kaylan remarked that:

> it seemed ironic that in the process of giving professional recognition to women artists, Magdalena had to ask them to work on less than (financially) professional terms. Many of us who paid for performances and/or workshops were oblivious of this political irony. Had we known, we could have had a tangible example of the notion that 'the process as well as form and content determines the politics of a piece of work'.[1]

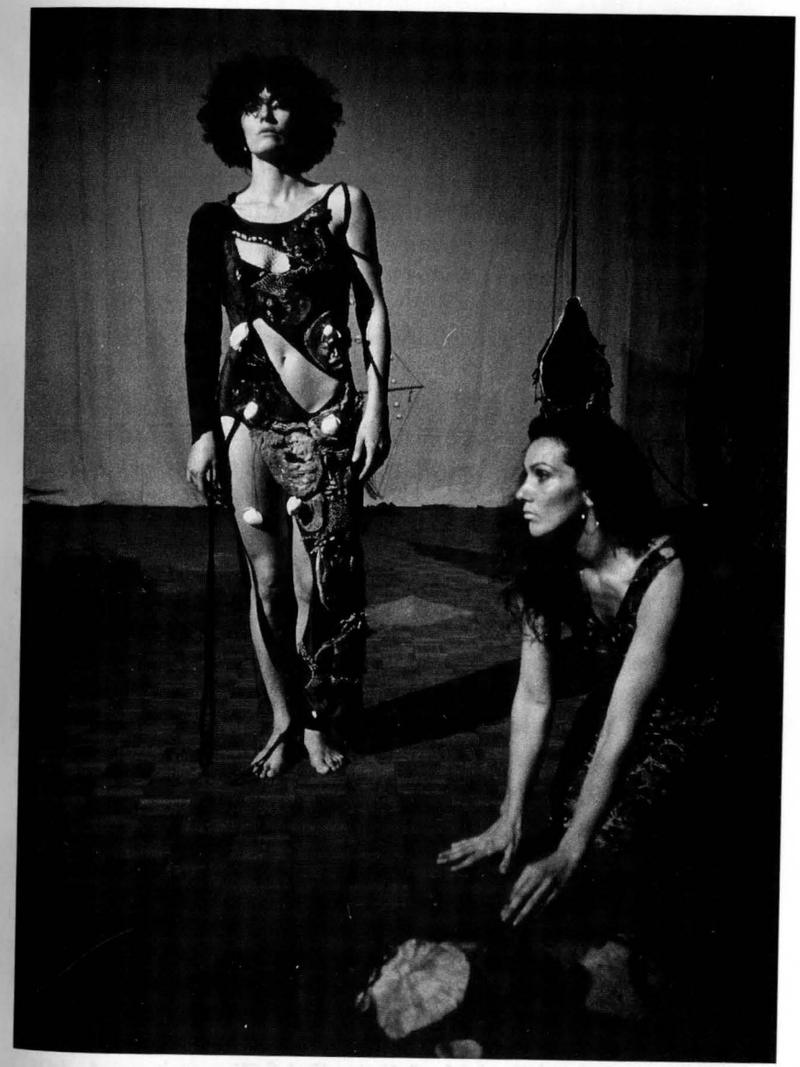
This is an important point, though it should be set against the feeling of the organising committee that large-scale funding by public money might well have imposed unacceptable working conditions upon the whole project. Crucial to the festival, they felt, was the need for artistic freedom, for a space in which to allow things to happen. The small amount of funding that the project received already carried with it one constraint – that of the final performance, the public demonstration of the work that was undertaken by the group in

residence for the full three weeks of Magdalena '86. As will be discussed later, there were feelings voiced that this kind of constraint was already unacceptable, since it meant that for the last few days of the project all attention had to be directed towards shaping that performance, and much of the work barely begun was left by the wayside. Nevertheless, the festival was underfunded, and it remains an unfortunate fact that many of the participants were under severe financial pressures right from the start, and in some cases the financial difficulties proved an insurmountable barrier.

The Shape of the Festival

Magdalena '86 was divided into two distinct phases. Phase I, which ran for one week, was open to the public, and some 150 people took part in workshops and discussion groups. During this first phase, individual performers presented shows they had brought with them, either already in repertoire or specially devised for the festival, and altogether there were twelve performances, all playing to packed houses. Phase II was the most complex part of the festival, the least planned and therefore potentially the most dangerous. For a two-week period, 38 women lived together and, out of their daily exchange of training methods and ideas, devised the final performance, which was again open to the public. The performance was to be the climax of the festival, a demonstration of the possibility of collaborative theatre work among women from so many different backgrounds and with such varied experience and skills. In her letter to the participants, Jill Greenhalgh attempted to explain what she hoped might develop from the collaboration. Noting that with so many women (and with such a short time in which to work) a polished performance would of necessity be impossible, she stressed her feelings that, with the collective resources that were to be made available, something extraordinary would certainly be produced:

> From the outset of this project it has been of paramount importance to try to define clearly a working process for this complex experiment. A female process. Do any of us know what that is? As director of the project I have been battling with this concept since the beginning and have been loathe to commit myself on paper. . . . I feel that this is a *work to be woven*. This piece will be made from material belonging to 35 individuals.



7. *Cinzia Mascherin and Sandra Salmaso in* No Man's Land

The task of making a whole from all the different input is something that each one of us will be responsible for, but we must be clear in our role and be able to let go of an over-personal attachment to any one direction.

Through sharing and developing our original ideas with each other, some common themes or threads will emerge and become

a natural direction, while others will have to be discarded. . . . We imagine that groups may develop. It may also seem appropriate to ask some people to lead work for the whole company. It may be that there will be moments of working in isolation.

Although we will of course be sharing all the work, the overall musical co-ordination will be the final responsibility of the three musicians. The performance environment and the overall visual impact of the piece will be created and designed by the team of artists. The performance *material* will come from the actors and the whole will be *woven* together by two or more weavers.[2]

The working method of the second phase was therefore completely open, and the success or failure of the project depended entirely on the ability of the group to find a means of working productively together. For some, the experience of working without a director was entirely unknown; for others the experience of improvising in large groups was quite new, and for all the participants the experience of running vast training sessions had never been encountered before. Performers, administrators, technicians, artists – all came together in training sessions, regardless of physical or vocal skills, and tried out whatever was being offered. In this way, all kinds of barriers began to break down – barriers between clearly defined roles in the theatre, barriers between hierarchies and barriers of language. Most importantly, individuals began to let down their own private barriers, to let other women pass through and begin to make contact in a new way.

A Magdalena Manifesto

Just before the Festival, Jill Greenhalgh issued a manifesto of what she hoped would happen:

An international Festival of the work of women in experimental theatre is taking place in Cardiff, Wales, in August. . . . . YESSSSS it's the same time as the Edinburgh Festival!

It has been initiated and organised by Cardiff Laboratory Theatre who, in recent years, has been committed to themes Female.

Around 30 experienced women theatre practitioners are gathering from 15 different countries, together with anyone else who's interested and decides to make their way; and pay their way here.

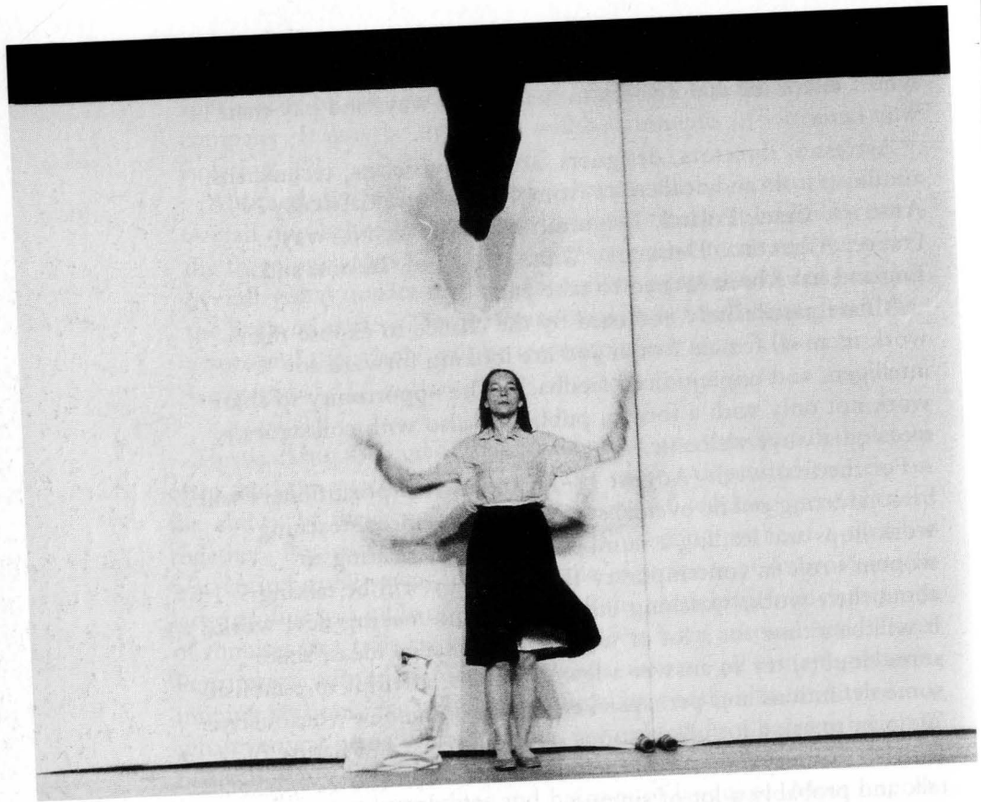
Actresses, directors, designers, artists, musicians, technicians, administrators and academics from Czechoslovakia, Italy, N. America, Israel, Poland, Belgium, Spain, Japan, Norway, France, Argentina, Denmark, Wales, Scotland, Ireland and England have been invited to take part.

All are passionately enthused by the chance to expose their work in an all female forum and are looking forward to intelligent and unprejudiced feedback. The opportunity to share work not only with a foreign public but also with colleagues is rare and always welcome.

For the first week (August 11–17) the invited practitioners will be conducting public events; staging performances, teaching workshops and leading a number of seminars relating to women's role in contemporary theatre. They will be talking about their work, watching others work and making new work. It will be a time for a lot of women to exchange ideas, share some doubts, try to answer a few questions, attempt to establish some definitions and perhaps even initiate some new vocabulary. We plan to ask a lot of questions on the essence and nature of female creativity. There will be a lot of work on show, a lot of talk and probably a lot of singing.

No, the events are *not* closed to men. There will be something going on for anyone with an interest in which direction the female contribution to contemporary theatre is taking. It will encourage an intellectual and practical debate about New Theatre – at least there should be a good chance.

In the second two weeks the invited women will all be involved in a collaboration that will result in a piece '*The Magdalena Performance*' being publically shown on the 29th and 30th August. . . . We shall not be working in a theatre . . . we don't know what the piece will be about. . . . . we do know it won't be led by a single creative vision but will attempt a collective piece woven from strands made by the individual women during the process of work here in Wales. It will be a piece that we might study once it has been mounted, and then try to understand what it has to tell us. . . . . We do know that



8. *Jolanta Krukowska in* A Dance About . . .

we are taking a risk. The alternative, of imposing pre-determined structures or even a process, seems somewhat contradictory to the spirit and reason of the festival.

The spirit and reason??. . . . . to wait and see what happens when you bring women, from a number of different cultures, together to make theatre.

. . . . . ah. . . . . I was asked to write a polemic article about why *Magdalena '86* . . . I looked up the word 'polemic'; 'a wordy warfare' it said, among other things. So I'm sitting here wondering what wordy warfare I should be waging and how it should relate to the reasons for organising this festival.

Perhaps I should take the line that attacks our culture's art which, in my humble opinion, is still hugely dominated by masculist energy, imagery, ideology, symbology, iconography and pornography, but which, even in our most progressive

circles, justifies itself as a true reflection of modernist society . . . but why should I make enemies?

Or perhaps a wordy warfare that might viciously reveal the hollow apathy of some contemporary critics who seem to whine their way through comfy salaries and add little or nothing that's dynamic, to the growth of theatre . . . but that's been done before.

Or . . . maybe we could examine the repetitive pattern that many women in theatre fall into, as a designer friend put it, playing nursemaid to men's visions.

Or I could put myself on the line and try to talk honestly about a deep feeling and fear of never being heard, of feeling you've been silenced, that somehow the work that you can feel lining your stomach wall, that you can't quite see because it's in shadow, has got no place. There isn't a language invented to cover or to search for it. And because there isn't this language it's as though the feeling doesn't exist. That's frightening when you know it's not true. It's a funny feeling not being able to explain yourself . . . especially when there's a knowing that there is something new and vital and female that is lying latent and untapped, trapped under thousands of years of patriarchal art and you just can't quite grasp it. Perhaps it has something to do with shape, colour, atmosphere and secrets . . . perhaps it is how music weaves with an image and an action to reveal something you never felt before. But mainly it's about not knowing yet and I, for one, am not ready to write polemic articles about this feeling.

You have to admit that it's not easy when what exists is a rigid and imaginatively infertile approach to devising new material, and that the work that is held up for us to praise as the brave new theatre is. . . . . well. . . . . why can't we get around to admitting that a hell of a lot of it is just plain boring . . . dull . . . manically egotistical and archaic? When did you last see something that moved you? When did you last get really excited about a piece of contemporary theatre? When did you last feel that you were in the midst of a serious, interesting dialogue about the finer points of theatre form? More often than not, these days, the discussion centres around the financial and administrative promotional coups that are achieved.

It's a fun game, some might say an essential one, but shall we

stop kidding that it's got anything to do with a real passionate caring about the state of the art and the things it needs to speak of. There seems to be an insistence that there's all this interesting work around . . . but there isn't, is there? Of course there are one or two companies with some real guts whose theatre is genuinely evocative and important and some of that has been shamelessly plagiarized.

I don't want to sound all negative . . . it's just that I cannot understand why there is such a fear – in artists as well as the surrounding personnel who push the work out – to come clean and say 'that piece hasn't made it . . . it's close but . . .' At which point one could extract the genuine steps forward that have been taken, put them in an overall context and learn something. What is getting in the way of this kind of development? What's stopping this more honest approach that would ultimately benefit us all? We could be constantly opening new doors, seeking fresh influences and we could be listening instead of constantly having something to say. If you've got the courage to share your work, rather than jealously guarding it, it has a far better chance of growth. We're not too keen on sharing in this country though. An idea becomes the property of the person who thinks they thought of it rather than something which has simply been revealed. It's extraordinary the arrogance and selfishness of British theatre art. And what is it really saying these days? – half of it seems to be involved in trite, visually interesting, psychologically arty thrillers, while the other half makes banal (and sometimes not particularly accomplished cabaret. *And* there must be another way to end a show than with yet another stunning apocalyptic vision of man's potential for self-destruction . . . with over-loud music.

I should be writing an article on 'Why Magdalena'. . . . . why a women's experimental theatre festival?

I've often wondered why the British are so stuffy when it comes to the term festival.

The French, Italian and Spanish theatre festival admits to the importance of sitting down and eating and drinking together. Talking, shouting and laughing about all the work that's on show could be the most important element of any reason behind organising a Festival. It's a very important way to feed the work. And I think we all need to show our work to our peers

and we need to whinge and dream about it in the company of those we know are likewise struggling to get it right. And mostly failing.

This Festival is about bringing a whole load of strong, talented women theatre artists together and seeing what happens. And it's done with love to theatre and a caring about its future.

Jill Greenhalgh[3]
Director, Magdalena '86

The Practitioners

MANAGEMENT TEAM

The organising team of Magdalena '86 consisted of the following people:

Gilly Adams	*Advisory group*
Susan Bassnett	*Documentation*
Pam Blackwood	*Production manager*
Peter Brooks	*Catering*
Sally Broughton	*Press consultant*
Yvonne Cheale	*Advisory group*
Aileen Christodoulou	*Documentation*
Judie Christie	*Administration. Front of house*
Ken Coburn	*Front of house*
Katy Dymoke	*Fundraising. Welfare*
Becky Fawcett	*Technical assistant*
Jane Fitzgerald	*Video documentation*
Mary Giles	*Photography*
Kari Furre	*Visual coordinator*
Jill Greenhalgh	*Festival director*
Richard Gough	*Artistic director of Cardiff Laboratory Theatre*
Kate Long	*Box office*
Joan Mills	*Advisory group*
Kay Stopforth	*Video documentation*
Sian Thomas	*Workshop coordinator. Translation*
Sally Thompson	*Information*
Mandy White	*Publicity Officer*
Faith Wilson	*Press consultant*
Tricia Webb	*Technical coordinator*

THE INVITED PRACTITIONERS

For the second stage of Magdalena '86, Jill Greenhalgh convened a group of some 35 invited women. In the event, this number varied slightly, and the final figure was closer to 40, hence the apparent discrepancy of the figure quoted in some of the documentation. Originally it had been hoped to include women from Europe, North and South America, Africa and Asia, and to have a combination of women whose experience of theatre was extremely varied. For reasons that have already been discussed, the final membership was somewhat different than the list originally proposed, but there was nevertheless a wide range of nationalities represented, and a wide range of practitioners with different working styles and methods.

In order to provide readers with some idea of the variety of skills represented, short biographical details of the performers, artists and directors are given below:

Alena (Atka) Ambrova

Born 24.12.1955 in Brno, Czechoslovakia.

Studied ballet at the State Conservatory, Brno, then acting at the Janacek Academy, Brno. In 1977 she joined Divadlo na Provazku (Theatre on a String) as an actress. Since its earliest beginnings in 1967, Divadlo na Provazku has come to be seen as Czechoslovakia's leading experimental theatre company. Despite its growth both in terms of size and variety of productions, and despite the move from amateur status to full professional status in 1972, Divadlo na Provazku has maintained a highly individualistic performance style. Since joining the company, Atka Ambrova has taken part in all the company's productions, contributing her own highly skilled anarchistic sense of comedy. Her solo performances with the company include: *Pas de Deux* (1980), *Concertina* (1982), *Old Woman* (1985).

She is also a writer and has choreographed several shows for the company. She is married to Vladimir Sedivy, the anthropologist, and has one daughter born in 1984.

Mistress of ceremonies in the final *Magdalena Performance*.

Helen Chadwick

Born 25.6.1955 in Cambridge, England.

Studied at Dartington College of Arts, then moved on to become a founder member of Dr Foster's Travelling Theatre Company in 1979, now one of the leading community theatre groups in south-west England.

In 1982 she joined the Cardiff Laboratory Theatre, moving on a year later to take the Advanced Diploma in Voice Studies at the Central School of Drama. Having decided that her principal interest lay in developing voice work, she has gone on to teach freelance in this area and is currently working part-time at the National Theatre. In 1983 she created her first solo performance, *A Gift for Burning*, a celebration of the work of six women poets. She is currently devising a new solo performance on women and fathers, and is working on a project on women and ageism. *A Gift for Burning* was presented at Magdalena, and Helen also ran a workshop on Voice, Improvisation and Song.

Brigitte Cirla

Born 3.6.1956 in Montagne au Perche, France.

She first performed in the French Cabarets in Rome, singing and playing the accordion, then in 1979 joined Zero de Conduite company. In 1981 she created her first performance for children, *Le Voyage en Plastique*. Since founding the La Colline Compagnie in 1982 with her husband Dominique Collignon Maurin, she has increasingly specialised in theatre work with children and adolescents. Faced with what she perceives as the difficulties adolescents encounter with short attention spans, she has developed a series of physical exercises designed to build up confidence and develop creativity. Her theatre work is closely linked to work in therapy. Besides this, she performs as actress and singer. Recent productions include *Medea Malum* (1985), *Jeux de Roles* (1986) both with La Colline and *Electre* (1987) with the Théâtre du Lierre, Paris. She has one son.

At Magdalena she ran a workshop for teenagers aged between 13 and 17 which led up to an open-air performance in the Hayes shopping centre in Cardiff.

Maria Consagra

Born 15.4.1954 in Rome, Italy.

Studied Theatre Arts at Sarah Lawrence College, New York, graduating in 1976. From 1977 to 1980 she worked with the Teatro del Sole in Milan, then joined Farfa under the direction of Iben Nagel Rasmussen from the Odin Teatret. Whilst with Farfa she appeared in a one-woman performance, *La Canzone di Rose* (1984) and with the company in *Heridos por el Viento*. She began her work as director with the Teatro del Sole, and in 1985 studied directing with Lee Breuer of

Mabou Mines. In 1987 she directed and performed in a children's show with the Teatro del Sole, *Uffa*! Besides her work as director and performer, she has been teaching theatre techniques since 1977. From 1984 to 1986 she taught acting and improvisation in the Dept. of Experimental Theatre in the Tisch School of Arts at New York University.

Maria ran workshops at Magdalena and made a street-theatre performance.

Grenland Friteater – Geddy Aniksdal, Anne Erichsen, Elin Lindberg

Geddy Aniksdal

Born 20.8.1955 in Vigrestad, Norway.

Presented two performances at Magdalena – *Les Miserables*, with Anne Erichsen and Elin Lindberg, which was first performed in Porsgrunn in 1985 and *The Stars are no Nearer*, her own one-woman show based on the life and work of Sylvia Plath. She also ran an improvisation workshop, using highly energised physical training techniques which have become a hallmark of the Grenland company work.

Geddy Aniksdal is married and has two children.

Anne Erichsen

Born 14.4.1957 in Copenhagen, Denmark.

She began working in political street theatre in Oslo in 1978. Then in 1981 she took part in a workshop run by Ingemar Lindh and entered into a period of intense learning, during which she worked with Odin Teatret, Riszard Cieslak and studied at the Institut for Scenkonst. In 1983 she joined Grenland Friteater.

Elin Lindberg

Born 10.12.1963 in Melay, Norway.

She joined Grenland Friteater as a pupil in 1983, and worked with Geddy Aniksdal and Anne Erichsen on the creation of *Les Miserables*.

All three performers perceive their work with the Company as central to their development as actresses and musicians. Grenland Friteater was established in 1976 in Porsgrunn, an industrial town to the south of Oslo. The Company work principally in the Porsgrunn area, though they have also toured extensively abroad. They regard it

as important to attract visiting performers and companies to Norway, in an effort to widen the horizons of Norwegian theatre. Grenland Friteater helped to start Norway's first theatrical journal, *Spillerom*. In addition to their productions, Grenland Friteater offer seminars based on their physical and voice training methods. The Company has developed an extensive physical vocabulary which has come to characterise their work.

Lis Hughes Jones

Born 4.10.1954 in Swansea, Wales, native language Welsh.

Studied English at Exeter University, graduating in 1977. As a result of meeting Mike Pearson she began working with Cardiff Laboratory Theatre as a costume maker. During her beginnings at Cardiff, she took part in a seminar on Kathakali and Balinese dance and a training workshop by Tom Fjordefalk of Odin Teatret, both of which gave her the basis of a physical vocabulary. Two women performers were also important influences – Sian Thomas and Iben Nagel Rasmussen. In 1981 Lis and Mike Pearson left Cardiff to form Brith Gof, in an attempt to found a theatre that reflected contemporary Wales. Since then, Brith Gof have created and performed more than twenty productions, and Lis has sung in almost all of them. At Magdalena '86 she presented her one-woman show, *8961 – Caneuon Galar a Gobaith* (*8961 – Songs of Grief and Hope*). She has travelled and worked extensively in South America and performed *8961* in Buenos Aires to a group of Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo.

Zofia Kalinska

Born 17.1.1931 in Horochow, Poland.

She studied at the Actor's School in Crakow and then worked for three years with Powszechny Theatre in Łodz. She was invited by Jerzy Grotowski to join his Laboratory Theatre but found it impossible to leave her small daughter and move to Wroclaw. Then in 1959 she met Tadeusz Kantor and joined his Cricot 2. Her collaboration with Kantor lasted for twenty years, during which time she created such roles as the Water Hen and the Street Walker in *Dead Class*. In 1984 she organised her own company, Akne Theatre, the first all-woman theatre group in Poland. Her aim is to create a new kind of theatre, based on psychodrama and trance, that concentrates on the psychology of women and explores female archetypes. Akne's first production, a new version of Genet's *The Maids*, received great

critical acclaim in Poland and abroad. In 1988 she directed the first Magdalena production, *Nominatae Filiae*, which was awarded the Lublin Festival Prize in October 1988 after a successful European tour.

Zofia Kalinska has one daughter and one granddaughter.

The Maids was performed at Magdalena '86 with Jolanta Biele Jelzmyk and Jolanta Gadaczek, and Zofia Kalinska also ran a two-day workshop on the Daemonic Woman.

Brigitte Kaquet

Born 7.2.1952, Liège, Belgium.

Studied at the University of Liège, then in 1975 worked on actor training methods at Odin Teatret, Denmark. In 1977 she co-founded Cirques Divers, a multi-media performance arts centre, and in the same year set up Théâtre de la Marmite, an all-women company in Liège. In 1979 she created the Cirques Divers Atelier de Récherches Théâtrales (A.R.T.). As one of the directors of this research centre she has organised a number of international theatre seminars with teachers from many parts of the world. She has worked with Jerzy Grotowski and Riszard Cieslak in Italy and has also maintained a strong interest in Oriental dance theatre. In 1983 she studied Balinese dance at the Seni Tari Academy in Indonesia. Between 1983 and 1986 she worked on the creation and performance of *Hésitations*, a multi-media experimental theatre sequence. This was followed by *Une Nuit ou l'autre*, which was first presented at Lille in 1987. At Magdalena Brigitte Kaquet presented *Hésitations 3 – La Présence d'esprit.*

Ida Kelarova

Born 10.2.1956, Bruntal, Czechoslovakia.

The daughter of Koloman Bitto, a well-known traditional Gypsy musician, she began at the age of seven to study music at the Opava Drama–Music School in Moravia. She went on to study classical piano, cello, voice and theatre at the Janacek Academy, Brno, and although offered a position in the Janacek National Theatre, she decided to join Divadlo na Provazku. She stayed with the company for eight years, during which time she became musical director, in addition to her work as actress, singer, composer and teacher. Since leaving Divadlo na Provazku she has lived in Britain and is currently living and working in Denmark.

She has two children.

Her current concert performance, *Gypsy Celebration*, was performed at Magdalena. Ida Kelarova also ran a day-long workshop on Hałecacky singing, which culminated in an impromptu late-night mass concert outside the Chapter Arts Centre in Cardiff.

Stacy Klein

Born 16.11.1955 in Baltimore, USA.

Studied at the Universities of Tel-Aviv, Wroclaw and Boston, culminating in a Ph.D. on theatre history and criticism at Tufts University. She has done a vast amount of work in education on all levels, ranging from university lecturing to teaching drama in primary schools. Her publications include a handbook on teaching children's theatre. She began her professional directing work with Little Flags Theatre, Boston, a political theatre committed to the production of original musical theatre for working-class and minority communities. In 1980 she founded the Feminist American Theatre, Boston, and produced the 1980 and 1981 Boston Women's Theatre Festivals, the first festivals of this kind in the USA. In 1982 she founded Double Edge Theatre and has worked as resident director with this company since then. She won awards for staging one of the ten best Boston productions in 1982, 1983 and 1984. Stacy Klein's work has evolved through the exploration of extensive physical and psycho-physical techniques. Double Edge feel they have progressed as a company from experimental feminist theatre work to a stage which they describe as a Theatre of Question.

Together with Stacy Klein, Andrea Dishy and Lorien Corbelletti ran a two-day workshop at Magdalena, entitled Touching the Core.

Jolanta Krukowska

Born 15.5.1950 in Warsaw, Poland.

Jolanta Krukowska is a founder member of Akademia Ruchu ('The Academy of Movement'), which was established in 1973 under the artistic direction of her husband, Wojciech Krukowski. Akademia Ruchu grew out of student theatre activity in the early 1970s and has developed a method of working based on intensive collective improvisation, seeking to transform signs of the usual into images of the unexpected. Besides their carefully structured indoor performances, the company set great store by their collective outdoor work. They have presented over 90 street performances and over 100 street events which are designed to reflect some of the absurdities of contemporary

urban living. Until December 1981 the company organised the programme of the Cultural Centre of Grochow, the working-class district of Warsaw. The work of the company is now widely recognised internationally and has been well received at major European festivals of theatre.

Jolanta Krukowska has one son.

At Magdalena she premiered the performance of *A Dance About . . .*

Anna Lica

Born 9.6.1957 at Aarhus, Denmark.

Studied at the Aarhus Theatre Academy, then in 1981 joined the Theatre Marquez. She stayed with the Company for five years, working closely with Else Marie Laukvik of Odin Teatret, who encouraged her to create her own piece. In 1985 she premiered her solo performance, *Madame Bovary – Downtown*, directed by Tage Larsen. After performing for a season with the Aarhus Theatre, she began working on a Shakespeare performance together with Tage Larsen, continuing to tour with *Madame Bovary – Downtown.*

At Magdalena she presented *Madame Bovary – Downtown* and made an appearance in Netta Plotsky's performance *The Happiness of the Pre-Form.*

Kozana Lucca

Born 18.3.1940 in Cordoba, Argentina.

After extensive travelling, she met Roy Hart in London and joined his company in 1972. She has remained with the Roy Hart Theatre ever since. The Roy Hart Theatre is a company whose work is based on the study of the human voice and extension of the vocal range. Since 1974 the Company's centre has been in the Cevennes in southern France. The Company comprises forty members, who live communally and continue to develop the work begun by Roy Hart and his teacher, Alfred Wolfson. Kozana Lucca works principally between South America and France, teaching voice and leading explorations into techniques of bio-dance. She is also an accomplished visual artist. After miraculously surviving a terrible car accident in 1985, she has turned increasingly to work on myths and archtypes, concentrating on positive life energy and affirming the harmony of human existence. She created *Piantos* in 1981 and in 1985 devised *Biting Life.*

At Magdalena she ran a specialist workshop on the Human Voice and led the seminar on Private and Public – Women's Spaces through Theatre. In the second phase of Magdalena, she created an autobiographical exhibition using as a metaphor the image of women's hair. Her book, *Madame Chevelure*, appeared in 1987, published by Editions Arbres de Vie, Malérargues.

Cinzia Mascherin

Born 29.12.1955 in Treviso, Italy.

Interested in theatre design and sculpture, her first full-scale project was with the Centro teatrale San Geminiano in Modena in 1985 where she devised a scenic sculpture for *Brevi Amori di Tartarughe*, directed by Alessandro Tognon, who also directed the 1986 Magdalena show *No Man's Land.* In 1987 she designed a production of *Waiting For Godot*, directed by Carmen Jakobi and performed in Cardiff.

At Magdalena she performed in *No Man's Land* and devised sculptures in wood, cloth and papier mache.

Sandra Salmaso

Born 5.5.1958 in Padua, Italy.

Studied at the University of Bologna, then took a series of courses on modern dance and attended Ingemar Lind's workshop on Delcroux. In 1983 she worked in France and Spain as joint organiser of theatre festivals, and from 1978 to 1982 was a performer with the Teatro-continuo group in Padua. Between 1980 and 1986 she worked with several directors, including Alessandro Tognon, and was one of the members of the Captive Waves project, the pilot for Magdalena '86 that took place in Cardiff in 1985.

At Magdalena she performed in *No Man's Land* with Cinzia Mascherin.

Netta Plotsky

Born 4.7.1944 in Russia, she emigrated to Israel at the age of 13.

She studied at the Nissan Nativ Acting Studio and at the University of Tel-Aviv. She performed with Khan Theatre in Jerusalem, playing leading conventional roles, then followed a period of work with the International School of Theatre Anthropology in Italy in 1980. She went for a time to Odin Teatret, exploring various modes of theatrical expression. She had developed an interest in the Oriental theatre,

and studied Buto in Japan with Kazuo Ohno and Nihon Buyo with Katzuko Azuma. Her teaching and performance work fuse Western and Oriental theatre traditions.

At Magdalena she performed *The Happiness of the Pre-Form*, a three-part improvised demonstration of her work in progress. She also acted as interpreter, facilitating communication between East and West, and ran a workshop entitled Every Moment Different Moment.

Graciella Serra

Born 4.4.1952 in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Studied at the Primera Escuela Argentine de Expresion Corporal, specialising in the teaching of movement. In 1978 with her husband, Eduardo Hall, she founded Inyaj Teatro. Both continued to teach while beginning to work on popular Argentine mythology. In 1980 they toured *Las Andanzas del Sapo* and in 1981, a year of intensive international exchange work, they began their exploration of *Facundina Miranda, una Historia de Vida*, by the anthropologist Manuel Rocca. The first performance of Graciella Serra's solo performance *Facundina* was in 1983, and after receiving major critical acclaim in Argentina, *Facundina* was chosen to represent Argentinian theatre work at the Festival of Theatre of the Americas in Montreal in 1985, where it won the award for best production. Besides her performance work, Graciella Serra has developed her teaching in schools and universities. Since 1985 the company has been based in Valencia in Spain.

Graciella and Eduardo have one son.

At Magdalena, Graciella presented *Facundina* and ran a workshop on Sense Perception. She also led a seminar on Women in Latin American Theatre.

Osmega Dnia (Theatre of the Eighth Day) – Daria Anfelli, Michelle Kramers

Daria Anfelli

Born 1959 in Italy.

Studied at the University of Bologna. In 1978 she began working with the La Ciotola group in Verona, that was closely linked to Libre Teatro Libre. In the early 1980s she worked under the direction of Isabel Soto and Graciella Ferrari. In 1984 she met up with Teatr Osmega Dnia and began her association with the Company. Having

returned from Poland to Italy with some members of the Company, she began work with Michelle Kramers on a street performance, *If One Day in a Happy City . . .* early in 1986.

Michelle Kramers

Born 25.10.1952 in Djakarta, Indonesia. Nationality Dutch and Swiss.

After completing her formal education, she worked for some time in publishing and was actively involved in leftist politics. In 1981 she returned to her initial passion for theatre, taking courses in Wroclaw, Paris and Zurich. In 1983 she travelled to Poland with her first performance, a clown street show, and met up with the Teatr Osmega Dnia. She is currently working with Daria Anfelli and Barbara Theobaldt on *If One Day in a Happy City . . .* and has just completed work on a joint German-Seneghalese performance project, *Forgotten Elements*.

Daria and Michelle came to Magdalena as observers and stayed to participate for the full three-week period, being especially appreciated for their translation work.

Julia Varley

Born 20.7.1954 in London, England.

Educated in Italy. During a period of intense political activity, she began working with Teatro del Drago, and took part in several tours before moving to Holstebro in 1976 to begin a period of training and study with Odin Teatret. In 1978 she entered the Company and since then has toured throughout the world in *Anabasis*, *J.S. Bach*, *Millionen*, *Brecht's Ashes* and *Oxyrhincus Evangeliet*. She has also worked in film as assistant director and producer and has extensive experience of running workshops. She has been involved in group projects in Wales, Spain, Canada and Scandinavia.

Julia Varley collaborated closely on the organisation of Magdalena from its beginnings.

ARTISTS

Gerd Christiansen

Born 5.2.1955 in Silkeborg, Denmark.

From the age of 14 she has worked with different aspects of the image – sculpture, painting, masks, environmental art, etc. She became involved in theatre when she was 20 and since then has worked

towards achieving a union between images and movement. She has also worked as a performer. In 1983 she moved to live in a small village in the South of France, having decided she no longer wanted to live in large international cities. In the village she is part of an artists' collective, *Totem*, working on theatre images and music. Her most recent work, *Dreams*, a project that attempts to cross the boundaries between artist and actor, is currently in progress.

At Magdalena she was one of the team of artists responsible for the visual impact of Phase II. Together with Rona Lee she designed and constructed the River Room.

Amanda Dike

Born 1960 in England.

Degree in Creative Arts from Alsager College. Co-founded a multi-arts co-operative, the Front, based in Lancaster. Among her projects with the Front are the multi-media performance event, *Mooring Big Ships in Tidal Waters* (1986), a film, *War Widows* (1983), and projections in support of the Lancaster miners and the anti-apartheid movement in 1985. Since 1985 she has also worked on set construction for the Duke's Playhouse, Lancaster. In 1984 she co-founded the Lancaster Women's Art Group.

Amanda Dike made a short film of Magdalena and was one of the team of four women who technically managed the performances in Phase I.

Kari Furre

Born 29.1.1950 in England.

Studied at Rose Bruford College. After working with the Young Vic and the Derby Playhouse, she settled in Lincoln and from 1976 to 1981 was Resident Designer with the Great Eastern Stage. Since then she has worked extensively as a freelance theatre designer in Coventry, Hull, Liverpool, Barcelona, etc. In 1983 she was commissioned to design the huge Christmas crib for Lincoln Cathedral, and in the same year she became artist in residence at St John's and St George's Hospitals in Lincoln, working on sculpture projects with patients. In 1985 she worked on the Magdalena pilot project, Captive Waves, with the Cardiff Laboratory Theatre.

Karri Furre has one son.

At Magdalena her role was to coordinate visual art work.

Hilary Hughes

Born 5.5.1949 in England.

Between 1967 and 1970 she studied at the Bingley College of Education, specialising in Art and Drama. After leaving college, she worked as a freelance silk-screen printer and designer and ran a shop specialising in arts and crafts. Between 1974 and 1976 she worked with Rat Theatre as technician and performer touring in Britain and Europe. She worked for a time as performing arts technician at Crewe and Alsager College, then from 1980 to 1983 as freelance designer and maker. In 1983 she began working again with Rat Theatre as performer, designer and stage manager, and took part in the Theatre Guild of Greece Festival of Women in Athens. In 1985 she became a founder member of Beavers, a company based in Newcastle, Staffordshire. She has taught stage management at Newcastle Polytechnic and performed at numerous community theatre events. In 1987 Beavers were actively involved in the Arts for Labour campaign.

Rona Lee

Born 29.3.1957 in England.

Studied at Goldsmith's College and Sherman Theatre, Cardiff. Since 1980 she has worked as a freelance designer and maker with Cardiff Laboratory Theatre, Horse and Bamboo, Theatre Alibi and large-scale community arts projects in south-west England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Her work includes fire sculpture, mask making, processional events and costume design. In 1985 she devised a performance art piece entitled *The Spear Side*.

At Magdalena she was one of the six visual artists and with Gerd Christiansen she designed the River Room. She also coordinated the Magdalena exhibition.

Jenny Spiers

Born 1963 in Edinburgh, Scotland.

Was accepted for the National Youth Theatre and from the age of fourteen worked in alternative theatre and explored natural history. In 1981 she began a foundation course in art at York College of Fine Arts and Technology, then moved on to Newcastle Upon Tyne Polytechnic, where she graduated in 1985 in Fine Art. Whilst still a student, she met Ian Hamilton Finlay and began to learn about gardening. In 1984 she exhibited at Northern Lights, a group show

by five artists of contemporary approaches to Northern European landscape, at the Edinburgh Festival fringe.

In 1985 she became a founder member of the Greenhaus Artists group in Newcastle. During Magdalena '86 she worked closely with Zofia Kalinska's Magic Circle, producing sculptures using natural objects.

Performances, Discussions, Workshops

Twelve performances took place in the first week of the Festival; three of them were world premieres and one, *No Man's Land*, was created specially for Magdalena by Cinzia Mascherin and Sandra Salmaso.

The five-woman technical crew worked flat out for the first seven days and were remarkably efficient. All the performances went off without a hitch and played to full houses. Reviews of the performances were generally good, though on the whole the Festival received very little media attention. The *Guardian* (21 August 1986) mentioned only three shows, by Zofia Kalinska, Lis Hughes Jones and Jolanta Krukowska in a tiny review that served more as an advertisement than a critical assessment. It is tempting to jump to certain conclusions about the lack of media interest in the Festival, and certainly many women participating in Magdalena felt strongly that the idea of an all-women event was antipathetic to the predominantly male reviewers and theatre critics. The organising committee had appointed a press officer and hoped for a much wider response to the Festival, in view of its uniqueness and in view of the large number of internationally known practitioners working together and showing their work, but this did not happen.

The performances varied enormously and revealed a wide spectrum of theatre work. In general terms, they can be categorised into performances structured around visual objects (*A Dance About . . .*, *No Man's Land*, *Hésitations 3 – La Présence d'Esprit*), performances based on the life histories of other women (*The Stars are no Nearer*, *Facundina*, *A Gift for Burning*, *Madame Bovary – Downtown*), musical performances (*Les Miserables*, *Song of Celebration*), performances reaching across cultural boundaries in terms of content and technique (*Life among Forms* and *8961 – Caneuon Galar a Gobaith*). There was also one production of a classic text, Zofia Kalinska's version of Jean Genet's *The Maids*.

9. Jolanta Krukowska in A Dance About . . .

Workshops also tended to fall into categories, with some focusing on voice work, particularly the ones led by Helen Chadwick, Ida Kelarova, Kozana Lucca of the Roy Hart Theatre and Brigitte Cirla of La Colline Company who ran a workshop especially for young actors. Other workshops took up the work on objects, as in the case of Maria Consagra's, whilst others stressed physical techniques (Netta Plotsky's workshop, and the one run by the performers from the Grenland Friteater). The levels of competence required in each workshop also varied, and some leaders chose to run their sessions throughout the week, while others preferred a weekend, and still others opted for a single day.

This variety of approaches and methods enabled a large number of participants with very different degrees of physical and vocal competence to work without feeling inhibited by their lack of experience or by the lack of experience of others. Clear indications were given by the workshop leaders as to what would be required of the participants. In some cases, the experience of taking part led to a strong sense of bonding between participants. This was very much

the case for those women who took part in Graciella Serra's workshop on 'Sense Perception', for those who joined Zofia Kalinska's sessions on the 'Daemonic Woman' and for those who took part in the weekend workshop run by Stacy Klein and Andrea Dishy of Double Edge Theatre, 'Touching the Core'.

Working with Objects

The emphasis on objects involved for some a process of seeing as creativity. Sandra Salmaso and Cinzia Mascherin, both from Italy, devised *No Man's Land*, described by Cinzia as 'an empty space, without border, beyond quiet'. The performance itself was structured around elements of dance and sculpture and hinged on images of fluidity and stillness. Inspired by Pina Bausch's *Bluebeard's Castle*, the two women constructed a performance with the intention, as Cinzia put it:

> of introducing a 'light', almost rarified environment in a landscape that I imagine as a lunar one, where there is a feeling of exasperated tension in the lives of the characters. In a second stage a feeling of calm develops with the passing of time. A desert landscape, where everyday objects take on a different meaning from the past and hung rope ladders are the place for forgotten memories.[4]

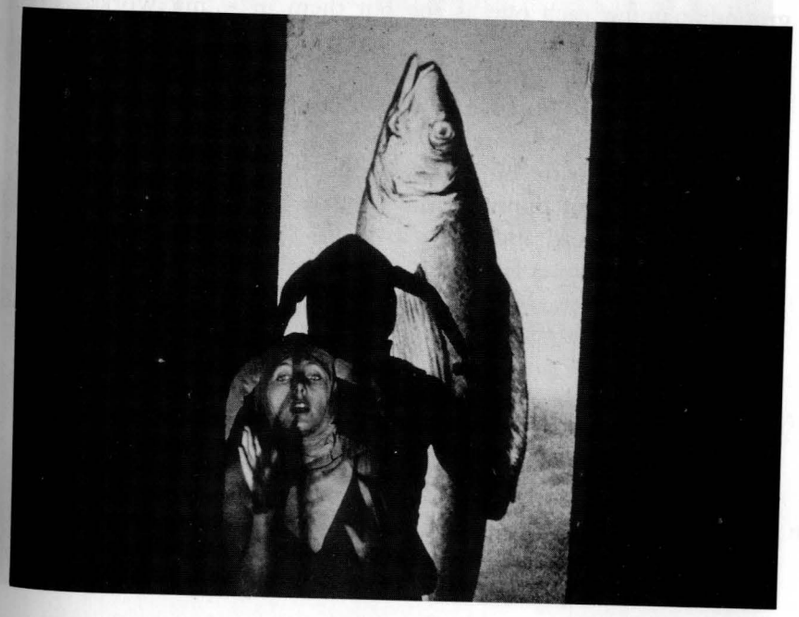
Both Sandra Salmaso and Cinzia Mascherin, in devising their performance especially for Magdalena '86, were concerned with trying to understand and make understood their process of working. In this respect, their performance typified much of what Magdalena '86 was about, of women groping for understanding, with half-formed ideas and a lot of energy, but never quite clear as to where that energy would lead them. Sandra attempted to sum up her feelings in a verse statement, written in August 1986:

> My eyes are curious and uncertain.
> Everything is out there in the world, so I have to refine my powers of observation, my seeing.
> I have to learn to see. Everything is out there in the world, you can imagine things that you don't actually live through or maybe your imagination really lives in its own right somewhere else.

> I think that from seeing with the eyes we can move to intuition. Intuition is knowing, guessing, seeing beyond.
> The act of creating seems to me to be the instant of really seeing:
> CREATIVITY IS SEEING.[5]

The problem for these performers was to find a means of representing the intuitive, of shaping in some form the process of movement and change that flickered across their awareness. Theatre, Sandra Salmaso argues, being on the borderline between dreams and reality, is the place where the fog can be allowed to lift, where fantasy can be shaped and made into concrete images.

Cinzia Mascherin, principally a sculptor, used a combination of natural and manufactured materials, combining the two in a series of explorations of kinetic art. The motif of the web recurs through her work, as does the motif of the labyrinth, the forest and the cave, archetypal symbolic images represented in wood, wire and plastic. Describing her working method, she suggests that the theatre is the natural habitat of varied materials, and that actors' bodies are one further source of sculptural material:



10. Brigitte Kaquet in Hésitations 3 – La Présence d'esprit

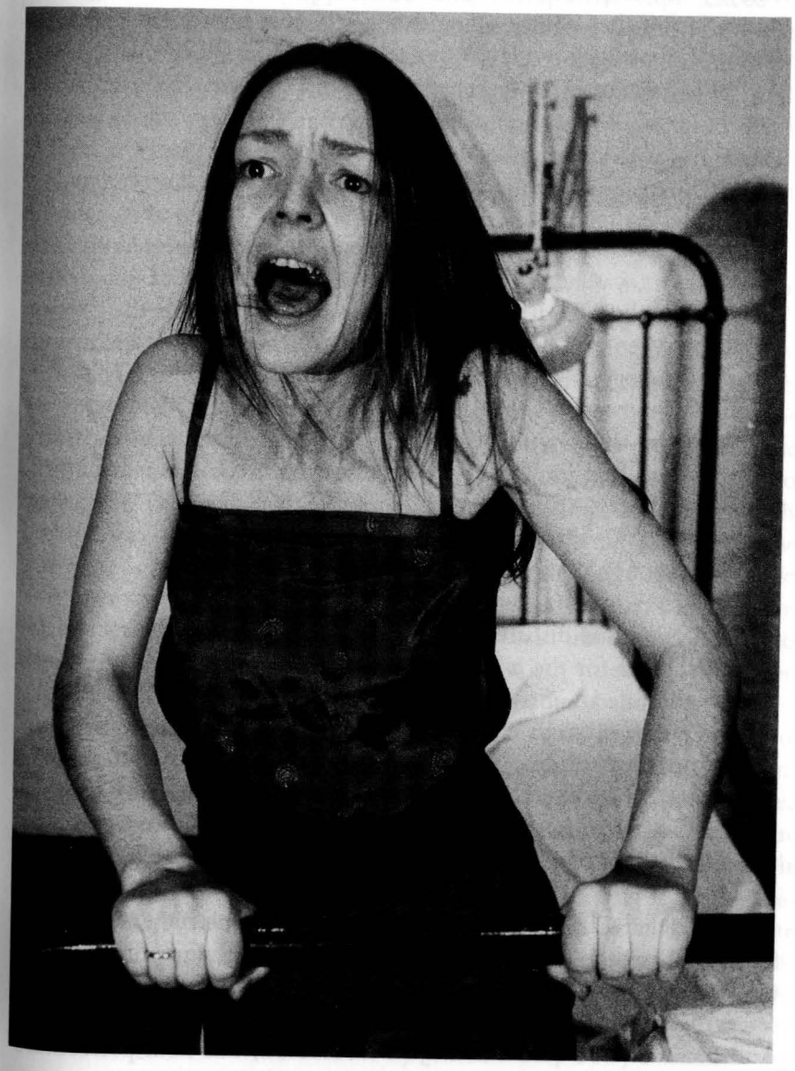
Theatre is space, which offers me possibilities for filling it, but it can also be a void, though always something in motion. Theatre is also time, and this devours you and inspires you. I realize that my colours are those of the seabed, both natural and fantastic: blue, green, violet, gold. My materials are: cloth, animal skins, copper, brass, clay, stones, rocks from the sea, shells, seaweed, moss. I think that when a woman creates it is as though she were submerged in water, through a finely suspended spider's web. Men work on dry land. Women are consoled by what they make. Men console the things they do make.
Women seem more magical to me.[6]

The emphasis on objects, on seeing as a form of creativity, recurred in the striking use of object-centred images in the final performance and was present also in other performances. Jolanta Krukowska's performance, *A Dance About . . .* relied on a combination of the solo performer's extraordinary technical skills as a dancer and the effect created by minimalist objects – stones scattered about the floor, old potatoes, a pair of high heeled sandals into which she tried unsteadily to climb. Above her head hung a plastic bag, and during the dance she steadily filled the bag to bursting point with the objects from the ground, naming each one as she put them in – 'my work', 'my marriage' and so forth. The simplicity of her performance highlighted the size of what she was saying – through the device of the stones, potatoes and plastic bags, she offered an image of her own life and, by association, of women's lives in general – a balancing act, an attempt to combine the impossible opposites of heavy stones and air, a growing sense of oppression as the bag of problems hung ever lower over her head and the final act of rebellion, desperation or explosion as the stones fell to the ground and the dance began again.

In the workshops, Maria Consagra from the United States produced some fascinating results from her technique of inviting actors to channel energy through the use of an object. Elin Lindberg's improvisation with a suitcase, begun during the workshop and continued in the final performance, was a virtuoso display of physical and imaginative skills, as she transformed the battered brown suitcase into a living creature, a Pandora's box, a tightrope, a confessional, a screen and a whole range of other living and dead things.

Brigitte Kaquet (Belgium) in her *Hésitations 3 – La Présence d'Esprit* relied instead on painting as a source of inspiration, using as its

starting point Magritte's surrealist *La Présence d'Esprit*, in which a man, a bird and a fish are represented rising enigmatically out of a landscape. For Brigitte Kaquet, the painting raises fundamental philosophical questions about human evolution, and her dance–drama similarly asks fundamental questions about the nature of theatre. *Hésitations 3* was part of an ongoing work in progress, of which two previous



11. Geddy Aniksdal as Sylvia Plath in The Stars are No Nearer

stages had already been presented elsewhere, that tried to explore the processes of an actress's creativity through visual images. Directed by Michel Antaki, *Hésitations 3* was an exploration of feminine archetypes, such as Ophelia and Faust's Marguerite, and this theme also emerged strongly in the final performance, fed by related work on archetypal figures by many of the other performers. *Hésitations 3* used texts by Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, Gertrude Stein and Marguerite Duras, and in her choice of written and visual points of departure, Brigitte Kaquet's show developed the idea of continuity through art, of women in contact with archetypal images of themselves across the ages.

ReCreating Women

Geddy Aniksdal's show, *The Stars are no Nearer*, directed by Tor Arne Ursen, was her first solo performance and was based on five poems by Sylvia Plath. In this piece Aniksdal explored the narrow divide between motherhood and madness, giving and devouring, that the imagery of the poems suggests.

Helen Chadwick's show, *A Gift for Burning*, also used texts by Sylvia Plath, along with others by Frances Bellerby, Stevie Smith, Ann Sexton, Marina Tsvetayeva, H.D., Susan Griffin and herself. Georgiana Berry, from the Performing Arts School of Worcester, Massachussetts, who took part in the first week of the Festival, had this comment to make about Helen Chadwick's work:

> For me this was disturbingly thoughtful work . . . the set seemed right for the texts chosen; the lamps were supportive of the theme of *A Gift for Burning*, and the combination of original songs sung, often in a hauntingly modal style, set a tone that for me combined the moods . . . it was a work that was artistically executed in a style that spoke the times, emotions, nightmares and wove them into a setting that reminded me for an hour of some of the writers and how they speak across time . . .[7]

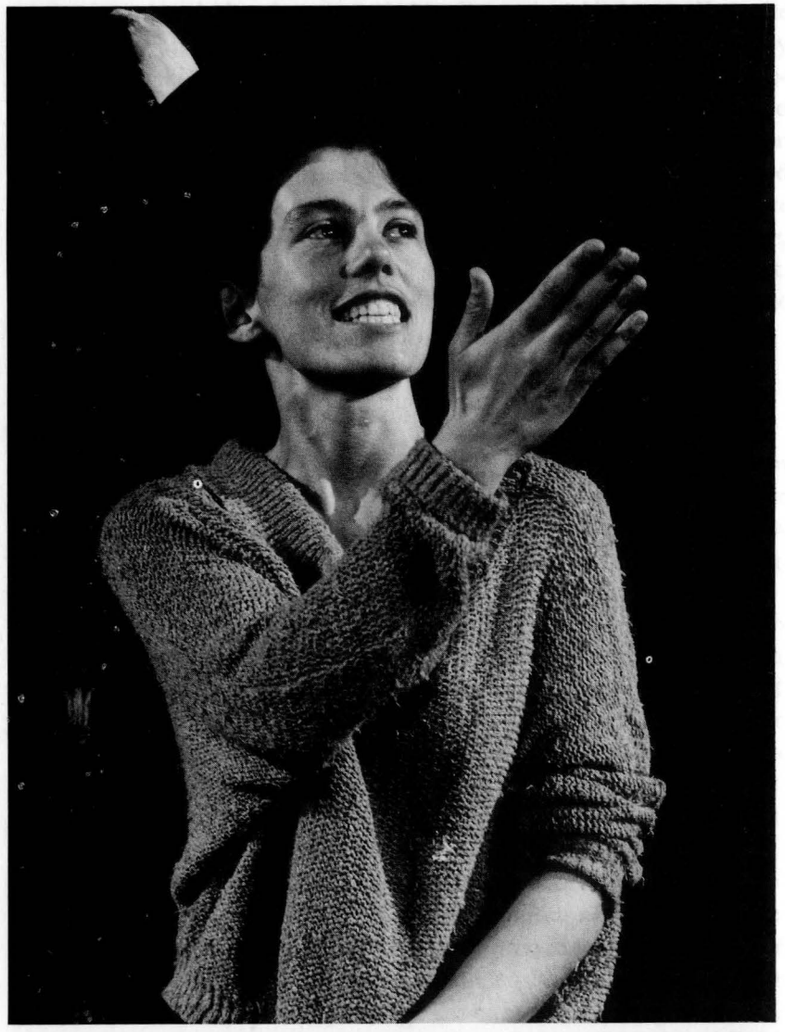
Both Helen Chadwick and Geddy Aniksdal constructed their performances in similar ways, using poetic texts but extending beyond the verbal to create a series of very physical images. Helen Chadwick's set, with a piano, chairs and lamps, was more naturalistic than Geddy Aniksdal's minimalist set with just a bedstead, but both performers

created a powerful atmosphere by relying primarily on the strength of their own voices and, in Geddy Aniksdal's case, her physical agility.

Another show derived from a literary text was Anna Lica's performance of *Madame Bovary – Downtown*, directed by Tage Larsen of the Odin Teatret. In this performance, a woman in the big city, Sally, shares the sense of oppression and entrapment experienced by Flaubert's Emma Bovary. Both women yearn for an ideal fulfilment of their dreams, but Sally's illusions, like her literary predecessor's, end ultimately in her own self-destruction. This performance used a number of different elements to create effects of power and disturbance – verbal texts were extended by the use of taped songs; lighting changes cut across the dance routines, and Anna Lica managed to generate an extraordinary energy, which made the final cutting off of that source of power all the more poignant.

Geddy Aniksdal's portrayal of Sylvia Plath and Anna Lica's *Madame Bovary – Downtown* introduced a theme that was controversial: the woman as victim, the woman whose suffering has no hope of escape and whose death becomes an inevitable last stage. Helen Chadwick's choice of material, though not avoiding the victim theme, nor the deeply disturbing question of violence, especially sexual violence against women, was nevertheless built around the idea of struggle for survival, rather than of conceding to despair. The woman as victim was noticeably absent from the final performance, almost as if there had been some tacit agreement amongst the practitioners to work on more positive aspects of women's experience. Even Brigitte Kaquet's portrayal of Ophelia in the final performance offered the image of an Ophelia striving for awareness and understanding, not of a woman giving way to madness and helplessness.

The triumph of a woman against all the odds was the theme of Graciella Serra's show, *Facundina*. The true story of a Chinquana Indian woman who lived to the age of 110, the performance, directed by Eduardo Hall, was played with a bare minimum of props and no scenic effects, and relied exclusively on Graciella's capacity to win over spectators, who could not understand the language she was using, by her powerful physical language. Her technique was to dissolve the invisible barrier between actors and audience by generating enormous emotional energy, an energy that seemed indeed to be rooted in the earth and in time. In her workshop on sense perception, she focused on the mechanisms by which a deep body awareness can



12. *Helen Chadwick in* A Gift for Burning

be reached, exploring a process of reaching within the self in order to offer oneself as an actor more completely to an audience.

All these performances in their different ways used the lives of other women as texts, and as the stories unfolded, they began to acquire a universality beyond their individual characteristics. So Geddy Aniksdal, a heavily pregnant Norwegian actress, playing Sylvia Plath, and Graciella Serra, an Argentinian actress of great

13. *Anna Lica in* Madame Bovary – Downtown

beauty playing an old Indian woman, both appeared to be performing at the same time as themselves, as their characters and as archetypal female figures that belonged to all times and all places.

Netta Plotsky's show, *The Happiness of the Pre-Form*, created three universal images of woman: the mad woman in the first part, an Ophelia as she might have been if conceived by Samuel Beckett, an old Polish Jewish woman in the second part, and a young woman in the third part, in which Netta Plotsky demonstrated her Buto training and explored work with masks. Diane Speakman, who took part in the first week of Magdalena '86 and afterwards wrote a detailed article of what took place, commented that: 'Netta Plotsky from Israel gave a performance remarkable for its inventiveness, visually, its generosity. She was the only performer to establish an explicit relationship with the audience: she started playing among us, eating an apple, tearing our tickets, making noises, evoking laughter. . . . She believes that . . . there can be no creativity without sexuality . . . '[8]

Music and the Voice

Some of the most successful workshops and performances in the first week developed aspects of voice work. Ida Kelarova ran a huge workshop on traditional Eastern European mountain singing, which culminated in a late-night, outdoor concert by all the workshop participants, and she also performed *Song of Celebration* to one of the biggest audiences of the Festival. In an open letter after the event, Ida Kelarova pointed out that this was the first time she had performed alone in front of an audience, and she believed that the workshop had overcome completely all possible communication difficulties due to the various languages spoken by the participants: 'I opened my heart,

14. *Graciella Serra in* Facundina

my everything, energie [sic], confidence completely – and I believe I gave a strong message.'

Kozana Lucca's workshop, 'Beauty and the Beast', developed some of the techniques on bio-voice on which she works with the Roy Hart Theatre. Kozana's work is based on the notion that voice work should be conceived holistically and that body awareness is an essential component of vocal training. This method differs from other forms of voice work which often focus on sound itself rather than on sound as a function of a larger organism, the body as a whole. Kozana's distinction between 'beauties' and 'beasts' was not only designed to explore the higher and lower vocal ranges, but also to enable women to play two completely different roles and so investigate two opposing facets of themselves. This was another extremely popular workshop, which allowed a lot of energy to circulate and which participants found very rewarding. The final performance at the end of the three-week period contained very little voice work, and this was in marked contrast to the amount of work in this area throughout the whole period. Helen Chadwick and Lis Hughes Jones led group singing sessions that everyone enjoyed, but in the final resort voice work gave way to the creation of visual images, which many participants felt was a great pity.

One of the most enjoyable shows of the Festival was the three-woman performance by Geddy Aniksdal, Elin Lindberg and Anne Erichsen, *Les Miserables*. Dressed as three boorish men in dark suits and dark glasses (interestingly, this was one of the rare moments of transvestism in the whole Festival), the three performers sang jazz, country-and-western and rock-and-roll pieces, creating an atmosphere of comedy and celebration.

The celebratory quality of the voice work was very obvious in the first week. Participants in the workshops seemed to emerge with the will to share and continue the work begun. Ida Kelarova fused her performance work with her workshop by inviting the members of her workshop to sing with her, and Kozana Lucca's massive session, in which the high sounds produced by Beauties struggled with the deep sounds produced by Beasts, was one of the memorable moments for all concerned. In contrast, those people who took part in some of the more physical or psychophysical workshops found it difficult to describe their experiences, and small separate groupings tended to develop as a result of the intensity shared inside the sessions.

Politics and Plays

The most overtly political show, and one of the most highly acclaimed, was Lis Hughes Jones' solo performance, *8961 – Caneuon Galar a Gobaith* (*Songs of Grief and Hope*). Directed by Mike Pearson, who, along with Lis, is a founder member of the Welsh language company, Brith Gof, the performance created the portrait of a woman whose loved ones are *desaparecidos*, kidnapped, murdered and tortured in Latin America, using texts by Pablo Neruda and Victor Jara. The 8961 of the title represents the number of people missing in one country, Argentina, in the 1970s during the period of repressive military dictatorship, and shortly after Magdalena '86, Lis Hughes Jones toured with the show in Argentina and gave a special performance for the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, all relatives of the disappeared.

Describing her working method, Lis Hughes Jones has said:

> I try to capture in performance the appearance and experience of women, often in a historical context or within a foreign culture. . . . My characters are rural or recently urbanized, and my voice is their voice. It is strong, often mistaken for a man's, but it is recognized as that of a woman by those who have heard a similar voice in another time or place. . . . Perhaps it is my voice which I feel is most my own, together with the songs I have written for several shows. And perhaps it is those songs which best convey my 'mothertongue'.[9]

The powerful political message of Lis Hughes Jones' work aroused a lot of discussion, and there was a separate session on Latin American women and theatre, where the question of the relationship between the Third World experience and the more distanced First World was heatedly discussed. But *8961* was not only about Latin America; it was also a universal statement about oppression and suffering and about the role of women left behind with their pain and little else for comfort.

If *8961* stood out as a uniquely political piece of theatre, Zofia Kalinska's production of *The Maids* stood out as a unique example of the performance of a classic text. This production, like her workshop sessions, relied on the psychophysical skills of performers in their relationship to one another. Trained for years with Tadeusz Kantor in

Poland, Zofia Kalinska broke away to create her own all-female company, Akne. Her working method is a lengthy one; performers gradually construct, destroy, deconstruct, and remake relationships within a group, stripping away layers of superficiality as they do so. *The Maids*, Genet's play about the power struggle between a mistress and her servants, was given another dimension in Kalinska's production. Madame, as portrayed by Kalinska herself, was a terrifying figure whose heavy footsteps could be heard even when she was not an actual presence on stage and whose white-painted face leered cruelly out of the semi-darkness, thwarting whatever pretensions to freedom the maids might try to develop. The source of the maids' fear and loathing of their mistress was skilfully transformed, and in addition to the class conflict that is embedded in the play, the production also explored the archetype of the devilish mother, the anti-carer, the destroyer.

Significantly, *The Maids*, written by a man (though a man defined by at least one feminist writer as an ideal example of 'the feminine'),[10] offered insights into another aspect of women that was barely touched upon elsewhere. Whilst some performances tended to show woman as victim, a fact which aroused a lot of critical comment, Zofia Kalinska's work showed women as capable of destructive power, as bearers of daemonic energy. It was an image that held strong appeal for some, and during the second phase of Magdalena '86, a group emerged that worked exclusively with Zofia Kalinska, her Magic Circle, as it came to be called, and in the final performance the group presented some of its work in progress. It is also noteworthy that of all the varieties of work that were shown and tested at Magdalena '86, only Zofia Kalinska's work resulted in the formation of a new, separate all-woman company, which came together in January 1988 to begin work on a new production, *Nominatae Filiae*.

The Second Phase

At the end of the first week of Magdalena '86, the mood was euphoric. The practice of eating together in the large kitchen was taken a stage further, and a great celebratory party concluded the public phase of the work. Thereafter, those involved were limited to the invited practitioners, who had agreed to remain and push the work onto its second phase, and the participants who had come to Cardiff for the first phase departed once again, though many returned

for the final performances to see whether they could detect what kind of changes had taken place in the intervening two-week period.

Diane Speakman, who did just that, leaving at the end of week one to return at the end of the month, summarised some of the questions that had arisen during the first stage of the Festival:

> What is the nature of women's inspiration and creativity? Does it differ from men's? Is there a separate style of acting and directing that can be described as belonging to women?
>
> Why are there no influential women theoreticians in the theatre, equivalent to Barba or Grotowski?
>
> Can child-bearing, which many women feel is a creative experience, be combined with artistic work in a process of cross-fertilisation? What is theatre? What takes place between spectator and actor? What is experimental theatre?
>
> Have we, as spectators, the right to say a performance is not theatre? Do there have to be professional standards of singing, dancing, acting, before theatre can take place?
>
> Do we have to understand a performance for it to be valid? Does it matter to the creators that people see different meanings and significance in the same performance?
>
> Are collages, fragments, episodes, cycles, natural structures for women? How can women go public, gain more confidence as artists in a patriarchal world?
>
> Do women speak a different language at work? Have we learned to speak in two modes? Can we develop our own language?[11]

Diane Speakman's list of questions, put together as a result of listening to the main issues discussed formally and informally throughout the week, cover a lot of ground and can be divided into various categories: those concerning theatre and its definition and policies, those concerning the problem of women's creativity on a more abstract level and those concerning the socio-economic status of women and the way in which this relates to theatre work.

The problem of the absence of women in theatre as theoreticians, directors, managers, etc. has historical roots, and although the Magdalena Festival was a forum in which to raise this and similar problems, the principal function of the event had always been to explore the possibility of women's artistic work. In this respect,

Magdalena '86 occupied an ambiguous position *vis-à-vis* feminist thinking about theatre, and significantly perhaps, there were relatively few women present whose work was principally in feminist theatre. However, several disconcerting questions were asked by feminists, particularly in relation to the representation of women as victims, which some women felt was offensive, and to the fact that so many of the performances had been directed by men. In a truly women's theatre, it was argued, the role of director, which is ultimately a very powerful one, should not be undertaken by a man. The counter-argument, also hotly defended, suggested that a concept of theatre which attributes all the power to the director is one which undervalues the performer and that experimental theatre is all about restoring the performer to a position of authority, despite the existence (or not) of a director. But what also emerged from the discussions was, perhaps predictably, an age difference that carried at least as much significance as other differences. Many of the performers were women in their thirties or older, who felt that they had already lived through their phase 'at the barricades of feminist ideology', as one person put it, and that the time had come to move on to other, wider things. In this discussion there were also marked differences between British women and women from other cultures; for the Eastern Europeans, for example, the feminist question was non-existent, whilst many others were surprised by the British insistence on class, accessibility of performance style and overt feminist statement as important ingredients in performance work.

One of the most important and vocal protests was led by one of the participants during the first week, Margaretta D'Arcy, Irish playwright and Marxist feminist of long-standing reputation, who attacked much of the work as elitist. She argued that most of the performances had set up barriers between performers and audiences, that the performer appeared on stage like 'a princess'. She also felt strongly that the tendency to emphasise the visual and not the verbal was potentially dangerous, since images can often avoid censorship, whilst a verbal text becomes a statement that, once made, has to be dealt with by the forces of authority. This view aroused considerable sympathy, especially since Margaretta's own clashes with censorship in Northern Ireland had resulted in her being held in prison, but her suggestion that much of the Polish experimental theatre work she had seen was quintessentially reactionary and anti-Marxist was more doubtful.

Margaretta d'Arcy's protest was important because she summed up the disquiet felt by a number of women present, particularly with regard to the type of theatre work that was being shown. Diane Speakman's resume of questions also raises the matter of what constitutes theatre, of whether 'understanding' is necessary for a spectator to be able to share fully in the experience, of whether aesthetic criteria also count. The ideological divide between 'showing' on the one hand, offering a series of suggestive words and images and leaving the spectator to develop those as she thinks fit, and 'telling', on the other, with a clear narrative line and strong textual component, came to be defined in class terms.

On the one hand, the 'showing' type of theatre was perceived as elitist, and the 'telling' version was suggested as engaging genuinely with the needs and possibilities available to working-class women. The counter-argument to this line of reasoning proposed that a narrative theatre, working from simple, accessible themes and structures, was aesthetically uninteresting and part of the heritage of traditional theatre work that many wanted to shake off. The question of being patronising to those women whom it was felt would be unable to cope with complex, abstract structures in theatre was also taken up, but the gap remained unbridged and probably unbridgeable.

The problems that emerged during the first phase highlighted the wider problems of the social contexts within which women were working. One issue that recurred several times in reviews (*Spare Rib* took up this point, for example) was the small number of women of colour who took part in the proceedings. Jill Greenhalgh was questioned about why there were no African women performers, and although she explained that African women had been invited but had been unable to accept the invitation, charges of racial prejudice remained on the table. On the night of the final performance one woman, who had taken part in Phase 1, staged a protest about the absence of women of colour, suggesting that this had been deliberate policy rather than accidental.

Besides the controversial issues of race, class, age and ideology that came to light during the public debates in the first week, other significant issues also started to emerge. For whilst there was a group that could be designated as 'feminist' in the widest sense of the term, there was also another group of women, many of whom were actively involved in peace camps, whose starting point was an absolute belief in a separate female/feminine creative process. This group, which tended to exalt the image of woman as mother, as human incarnation of the Great Mother, the Ultimate Creator of all things, often stood at the opposite pole to the feminists. So, for example, in a discussion on what kind of images should be presented in a women's theatre, one group wanted to glorify and develop images of domesticity and caring, whilst the other group wanted to reject all such images as typifying the history of women's confinement to the home and oppression in the world outside it. Likewise, whereas one group looked to images based on cyclical movements, on phases of the moon and menstrual rhythms, the other group rejected these as symbolic of the biological constraints that restrict the free movement of women in the world.

By the end of the first week it was clear that no agreement was possible. A very large number of women had come together, had shared their work and explored new areas with one another, crossing barriers of all kinds in the process. But beneath all the solidarity and sense of sharing, there were strong undercurrents of difference, an awareness of varied points of origin and very different goals and intentions.

Magdalena Voices

The women who remained to work together for the next two weeks were aware of the problems that had begun to emerge but were immediately faced with other, more practical problems. The principal questions were organisational: the disused potato factory that was to become the performance space had to be prepared; strategies of daily work had to be developed; the vexed question of directorial control and responsibility had to be taken on board; the relationship between performers, technicians and visual artists had to be worked out. In an open letter, written some months prior to Magdalena '86, Kari Furre warned about the possible difficulties that awaited them:

> During discussions about Magdalena '86 I have found myself retreating from and rejecting innocent comments about the design and feeling alienated from the project and not really sure why I was reacting so badly. I think that this is because there is no history (that I know) of visual artists working independently within a theatre structure. . . . Visual artists clearly cannot

become performers, but no more must they be there to refine the visual contents of the performance. There is such a strong element of illustration in theatre visuals which would be so easy to take refuge in, indeed difficult to avoid, that I feel Magdalena '86 needs to take a sideways look at the way the visual content is achieved.[12]

In the event, Kari Furre's reservations proved only too true. She herself left in the second week, because she no longer felt able to work in an environment that she felt was draining rather than energising. The other visual artists remained, but for all of them, except for Jennie Spiers, who worked closely with the small, separate Magic Circle group, there were serious problems. Cinzia Mascherin found herself increasingly isolated, in part because of her lack of English, and spent some time transforming areas of space on the margins of the main playing areas, outside the building and in a room that served as a kind of antechamber. That she felt constrained to work on the margins speaks for itself.

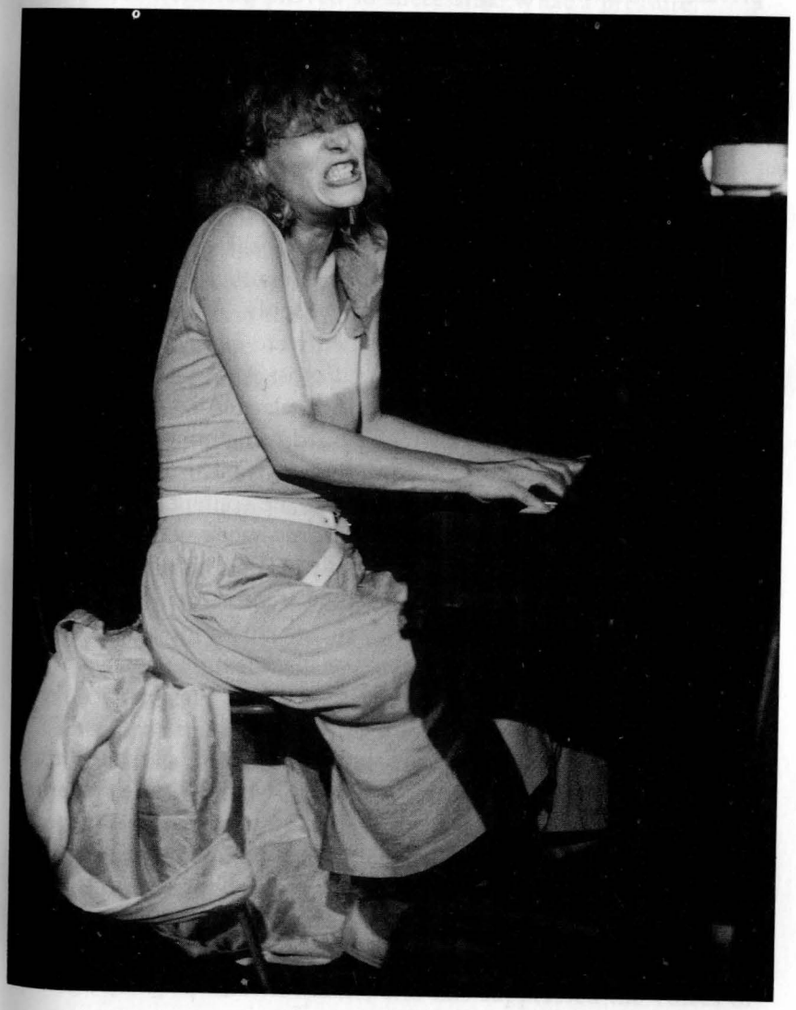
Gerd Christiansen and Rona Lee worked on devising the River Room, a long empty space with pillars reminiscent of a Roman arcade, which they covered with pallets and sand and then filled a central strip with water to create the impression of a river. Because of the size of the River Room, which was not only the largest physical space used but also required the most preparation, that space came to dominate the other areas, and perhaps because of this Gerd Christiansen, along with Geddy Aniksdal, who elected to do so by choice, came to take on directorial roles. This assumption of the role of directors of the final performance came to be seen as problematic for many of the participants, and the hostility generated on some occasions shows the extent to which the vexed question of power structures within theatre failed to be solved by the women in Magdalena '86.

Rona Lee's final assessment of what happened is representative of the negative feelings shared by some of the visual artists:

> I now feel it to have been a failure, victim of its own arrogance and naivety. The underlying premise of the collaborative section of the work was: 'that there is a uniquely female expression' and that it could best be explored by dispensing with defined structures. I do not doubt the existence of a store of female

expression nor its value; the danger is however that in a situation such as Magdalena '86, it becomes exploitable, the prerogative of the few rather than the many.

The notion that structures can be dispensed with is wrong; all that happens is that they become covert and consequently open to abuse. Freed from some of the constraints of patriarchy, did we really question existing hierarchies? I think not. However sound the intention, it is not in itself enough. Agents of change



15. Ida Kelarova performing at Magdalena '86

must be both pragmatic and rigorously self-questioning in order to avoid becoming zealots. Sentimental notions of sisterhood and the mystification of art do both feminism and theatre a disservice. The unwillingness to address oneself to process and content can be irresponsible, allowing room for the misuse of power. Overly concerned that there should be harmony, some took it upon themselves to edit the opinions of others. Those who expressed fear, anger, dissent, were made to feel, both publicly and in private, that their feelings were gauche, disruptive and insensitive. Thus, beneath the hugging and singing, there lay a sense of fear which, fuelled by insecurity over the public presentation, created an increasingly ruthless atmosphere of individualism and competitiveness.

It is not that either of the latter are themselves unhealthy. Indeed, self-responsibility and interest are an important part of independence. Nor was there a lack of individuals prepared to be generous and supportive. The problem was that the body politic lacked the means to protect itself from prejudicial practice and the oppression of minorities. However tacitly, Magdalena '86 subscribed to a system of values which were racist, ageist and artistically elitist. Those who suffered most were the least confident, least established and least articulate. Also marginalised were those whose concerns were deemed to be non-artistic: administrators, technicians, the production team.

Another casualty of this situation was the content of the work. Throughout the Festival individuals shared work which was powerful, witty, intelligent and socially and politically aware. The group work, however, was clichéd, sentimental and indulgent. Hardly surprising when the group forum raising issues such as the non-involvement of black women was throwing stones in a glass house.[13]

The problem of power was also keenly felt by some of the technical staff and particularly by the younger women. Mandy White, who had served as publicity officer, wrote to Jill Greenhalgh some months after Magdalena '86 (all participants had been invited to write in with their comments) and expressed her feelings about a sense of having been marginalised and made to feel less important than 'the performers'. She also questioned the different experiences she had felt in the first week and in the second two weeks of the project, saying that:

> In hindsight, my feeling about the work (cruelly) is disappointing. The audiences accepted poor work. Having been in a workshop all day, 'high' and 'buzzing', really anything could be shown. And that first week was such a wow. For the performers to be asked in the second two weeks to disregard the structure of the first week and get on with working together – of course they were inflated by this and quite tempted by the traditional hierarchic theatre structure – made them nervous, frightened. The first week had proved so successful. What a pressure.[14]

Mandy's point was that the performers were being asked to readjust not only their method of working, i.e. to move into a large collective structure, but also to rethink their traditional notions about the roles of technicians, performers and directors in the theatre, and that this was bound to fail. As a technician, and hoping for an alternative relationship with the performers, she was disappointed when that change did not happen. She also pointed out, significantly, that many of the technical staff were considerably younger than some of the performers, and again the question of age and experience emerged as a point of contention.

Katy Dymoke, one of the organisers, wrote:

> Magdalena '86 fell into the bracket of elitist international festivals despite itself. Performers were given precedence over the service women – technicians, designers, crèche workers, etc. – if only through no better motivation than an honest attempt to make up for their lack of comfort and to acknowledge their efforts to come. It remains true though that we did fail to escape from the patrilinear tradition; we were all supposed to do our work and be considered equally creative whether holding a hammer, a light or the stage.
>
> The apparatus didn't change – the performances were in the box, with the technicians hidden from view; there were no curtain calls for them, etc. There was also no discussion about the possible implication of a feminine model. So, many women were excluded from feeling any more affinity with the work than they would have in a mixed group. There was nothing 'new' offered.
>
> Sadly, in the discussions, precedence was given to the practitioners, or known names, and this suppressed the voices of

16. *Grenland Friteater: Geddy Aniksdal, Elin Lindberg and Anne Erichsen as* Les Miserables

many who expected to find an opportunity to speak in an environment that offered support, in the hope of discovering new ways forward. We rarely got beyond statements, and discussing titles and the known. It seems phase one was much about projection and very little about exploration. Something we could have learnt to help phase two would have been to avoid the precedence given to age and experience – listen and learn, yes, but for a truly organic collaboration to occur, let all be heard.[15]

The work in the second phase quickly developed into a pattern. In the mornings, different women would run training sessions in the gym at the Chapter Arts Centre, open to everyone. In the afternoon, the women moved down to the factory and divided into groups to carry out different kinds of work. Zofia Kalinska's group gradually emerged as a team of eight, meeting daily and working on improvisation techniques within the circle they created, and another group collected around Anna Lica and Atka Ambrova of Czechoslovakia,

who eventually took on the difficult role of becoming mistress of ceremonies in the final performance. For Katy Dymoke, this fragmentation into smaller working groups, however, represented a failure of the collective ideal:

> There was, consequently, no common vision, no binding to hold the work together. We deceived ourselves by believing the collaboration would unearth the 'darkness' stirring inside women today; it was possible only until there was a choice to work in groups, with Zofia on Trance, or with Anna on another entrancing piece, or with Geddy and Gerd in the River Room. This choice was an abdication of the idea of collective spectacle, resulting from a process of collaborative work with the space, with artists and with technicians, to try a new way/new ways which would break down these divisions.
>
> Surely a woman director in Magdalena would consciously avoid the label 'director', and try to be a 'Weaver', if aware of the silencing we had all hoped to escape. What happened was that the weavers had status, status attained by the experience of years working with *masters* in the Experimental world. There were differences? There was deception, self-deception; Michelle cried when she realised she had capitulated, in a piece that was suppressing her creative energy, to the vision of the weaver who she trusted because of the fascination surrounding her work, the daemonic woman. Zofia's group constantly collided with one another and reached a level to be expected in any project that involves peripheral listening and watching and yet total absorption/entrancement, till the darker forces are unleashed, carried on over ten days. However, the process was, we hear – and we all tried it – fascinating.[16]

If the responses of some women were negative, however, others found the experience of working together an enlightening one. The following quotes, taken from letters of several women describing what Magdalena '86 had meant to them, suggest that the impact of the Festival had far-reaching consequences, both in personal and professional terms:

> I have had to rethink my position/role as a feminist theatre woman both in terms of work and the community. Maybe the

conclusions both of us reach are different, but I think the confrontation with certain questions is ultimately more important than the answers.

Stacy Klein

Normally I work in a company with five actors, and it was amazing to feel the energy of being so many. To me, there was some kind of gap in energy and concentration between the morning training at Chapter and the performance work at the factory. The most important to me was the work with Zofia's group. When I realized that it would be impossible to create the show all together at the potato factory (it took me some time because I was really hoping for it) I decided to work with a smaller group and go fully into that instead. Here, I found something specifically female in the essence of what we improvised. Some of us could, in this situation with no men, even do some research on our stronger, more 'masculine' sides that seldom show up when there are men.

Anne Erichsen

Elin Lindberg, one of the youngest practitioners, tried to describe what had happened to her in terms of images:

Wales and the rain – the first night: thunder and lightening and Jill was standing on a chair wishing us all welcome. 'She looks like a kind of witch', I thought, and I looked around at all the other women – 'hm, is this some sort of witch-congress? Daemonic women?' I looked around again and I felt fine.

The women's suitcases were well filled with performances and knowledge. I saw all the performances and I became impressed – so many ways of being an actress.

The working sessions in the mornings were very important to me – tastes of different ways to work.

It was a moving festival in many ways, but I didn't really understand the richness until I came home and suddenly was standing still – still – still; I had to start walking on my own legs again.

Elin Lindberg

Julia Varley wrote at length on Magdalena '86, describing her reactions on arriving at the Festival (she came later than the other practitioners, due to professional commitments), and her document again shows the way in which so many of the women present struggled for an adequate language through which to articulate what had taken place:

It was not easy to be always questioning while going against the rules our professional experience had taught us. Wisdom was immersed in chaos and obviously very emotional.

Jill was choosing to be responsible by being irresponsible, to be the director of the project by not directing.

We worked without a director, without a theme, without scenes; we worked as much as possible all together, 38 women, without a title, following all possible threads.

Magdalena . . . Magdalena? Magdalena! became the title, nearly an anthem, during what was called 'the' performance, a collective improvisation developed from the morning work session of Jolanta, which half of us were lucky enough to see and the other half to experience. A 'performance' for no outside spectators, which could not be repeated. Just the first, tentative and insufficient step of theatre.

When I arrived, two things surprised me: that smaller groups had not automatically formed to propose and fix performance material and that so many hours were still spent in the gym.

Looking back, Zofia's work, the potato song, the bed scene, the River Room, Atka, the final offering were smaller groups, were fixing material, were using the chosen spaces of the potato factory, but at the time everything and everyone criss-crossed to an indistinguishable extent, so it did not in any way resemble or feel like groups and scenes. It looked like theatre work being developed by people following chaotic inclinations.

Why the river? why were tons of sand shovelled into a room? why the bed? why pulled by strings in opposite directions? why the table? the drop of water? why the magic circle? I don't know. A few answers could come from those who first proposed those items, if they remember. But I did not ask myself those questions.

I heard Kozana wanted a boat of voices; I joined. Going through a text in the early morning to keep up my personal

17. *Lis Hughes Jones in* 8961 – Caneuon Galar a Gobaith

voice training and finding it had a different meaning in that context, I took it to the river together with Helen and her baskets. Cinzia asked me to throw my hair over the railing, and I did. Netta wanted to see my childish face, and I showed her. Whenever it could my obsession with the manifestation of opposites found its space, commenting on the work I saw.

I looked at Jolanta dig a hole in the sand, take some in her hand, cover the hole, walk to another place, dig another hole, put the sand from her hand in it and cover the hole, then walk

away, smiling. The questions I *was* asking myself were others. Why is this different? what is different about working just with women? what, how, when is this experience helping each of us to go forward in our profession, to define our language, contributing even more strongly to the theatre groups we come from? what is particular to a woman? to an actress? to her way of perceiving and expressing reality? what is her special secret? An answer came to me from Eugenio during the Ista congress of September 1986 in Holstebro. He was talking of the arrogance of knowledge, which had mined the curiosity of exploring to assert positions, avoiding the meeting points to exchange and keeping the clash with no development. I looked back to Magdalena and understood clearly that there it had been different. *Because* it was only women, the need to discover, to question was overwhelming. It created a common solidarity which used the big differences in experience, style, character, colour, to go deeper into the questions. There could not be a winning statement, because no one was interested in hearing or uttering it.

Julia Varley

Maria Consagra, director, performer and academic, also tried to describe her feelings and to provide insights into the significance of Madalena '86 for women's performance as a whole:

My first reaction to the idea of Magdalena was a bit sceptical; I felt that the women chosen to participate were not from a wide enough range of theatre styles, of theatre worlds. They all belonged to the Odin Family – most did. The idea of creating something to show – a piece – in two weeks, while sharing each other's background, seemed terribly difficult. Zofia's group was formed for the most conventional reasons and in the most conventional (almost) way. Zofia's work was admired extremely by all of us; we wanted to learn from her; we wanted her to lead us. It seems natural that, when something wants to get done, individuals bring out these competencies, and natural leaders emerge. It seems logical that the magic circle had the least problems. And the frustrations of some women make me think that they focused too much on product. Magdalena is passion

that has not found a structure. Magdalena changes its meaning as I change, as my change meets other women changing, for *Magdalena is us*. We can understand the shape of Magdalena only after it has happened; you cannot see the shape of something as it is happening. Magdalena is not a Festival; Magdalena is not a workshop; Magdalena is Jill; Magdalena is Susan; Magdalena is Brigitte C.; Magdalena is Brigitte K.; Magdalena is Julia; Magdalena is Anna; Magdalena is Anne; Magdalena is Jolanta; Magdalena is Jolanta's show. . . . OK, I'll stop.

Jolanta's show. It is the most FEMALE show that I have ever seen, the show that most made me realize, reaffirm, that women do have a different poetic of expression than men do – and let me add that I think it is strictly connected to the work structure of the group – the poetics of theatrical expression. (I should think about it more actually, but not now. I'll keep that affirmation, none the less.) Jolanta was Jolanta in front of that specific audience that night, by which I mean she was speaking to us, picking up at times, ever so delicately, on our reactions. She spoke about herself in theatrical metaphor. She was completely present to that room, to that space and to us. She had no fourth wall. The show she did the last night was completely different than the one she did the first night. She was not a *personaggio*. She was shy, and we saw it; she was embarrassed, and we saw it; she did not have a structure of *personaggio* through which to mediate and focus those feelings. Why do I think all this is more female work than Pina Bausch, let's say – when Pina does use a fourth wall – I suppose it is because the primary difference for me between men and women is how they relate to others, to life, to themselves. They interact differently with others, and others in theatre is not only others on stage with you but the audience.

My workshops – the ones I gave the first week – were very rewarding, or should I say the second was very rewarding, for I worked with only three people, and they were older and already *really* professional, and thus I tried out many things. The workshop was on creating a small theatrical piece with an object. The objects used were suitcases, umbrellas, pots (heavy). The object becomes a channel–obstacle through which energy and imagination must move, deal with. At the beginning one creates actual physical tasks – balancing the object on head, throwing it

and catching it, allowing the energy exerted to carry you into new dynamic ways of dealing with the object's weight solely; it helps you discover new actions/movements; part of the interest for me was to discover the different approaches that each person had to the object – after the first indication of moving with the (weight of) the object.

Maria Consagra

Some of the impressions were expressed with great clarity; others seemed vaguer and more confused, but from all the testimonies came the sense of an active attempt to articulate the unspoken and not only to describe an enriching personal experience but also to establish some notion of what a women's theatre might be. All those who wrote about Magdalena '86 were aware of the additional difficulty posed by the absence of an adequate terminology through which to describe what had occurred. The problem of defining a women's theatre without a language in which to speak about it came to the fore and has since provided a central area of investigation in later Magdalena conferences and workshops.

18. Jolanta Biele Jelzmyk and Jolanta Gadaczek as Claire and Solange in Zofia Kalinska's production of The Maids

The Magdalena Performance

The final performance took place on the last two evenings in August and was open to the public free of charge. The performance had always been perceived as an integral part of the Magdalena Festival, but during the second phase some disquiet had been expressed about the constraints posed on the daily working routine by the need to create a performance. It was argued that in barely two weeks, anything presented to the public would be inadequate, but at the same time it was important to open up the work and show what had been going on. The daily routine of morning training sessions, followed by afternoon work in separate groups, became more focused, and energies were directed towards the creation of a performance. In this process of creating a public demonstration of the work, choices were made, and again the way in which those choices took place caused a lot of controversy. The two women in the directorial role accepted and rejected work offered, and the performance spaces became localised in two areas, the River Room and the large, square space in which Anna Lica had placed a double bed. Early ideas for developing a labyrinth, which Cinzia Mascherin had wanted, or for the inclusion of group singing were abandoned. The final performance consisted of a sequence of improvisation work performed by Zofia Kalinska's Magic Circle, Anna Lica's group work with the brass bedstead in the square space, a brief improvisation outside the building beside the canal, a short weaving sequence in the anteroom which Cinzia Mascherin had decorated with her sculptures and which Kari Furre had used to paint a savage, bloody mural, expressive of her feelings of frustration and pent-up anger, and a series of individual improvisations in the River Room. Diane Speakman, who saw the performance on both nights, describes what she saw:

> I saw the work-in-progress (for which the public was not charged) on both nights, and this proved to be essential, for spectators were split up and saw different things each night. I hadn't known this the first evening and had interesting if bemusing discussions with other spectators afterwards.
>
> The area outside and the whole ground floor of the factory were given over to a promenade production in twelve scenes. The structure, particularly the first night, resembled a patchwork of different pieces of material woven – an image floated by

19. Kari Furre at work

> Greenhalgh to practitioners at planning stage – into a loose whole. There were changes to the content the second night, with the result that the place cohered much more, and was seen to be a time piece – no one actually took an alarm clock apart, but we had to wade through a sea of them on the way out. . . .
>
> Several sequences did work or did begin to work, for me. The

opening was haunting. Set in an industrial urban wasteland fit for washer-queens, and to bell-peal and gulls' cries, Hughes Jones and Krukowska shared a work song (if not the work), as Hughes Jones thwacked and washed and hung out sheets by the canal. Lica walked perilously along a parapet, in her potent slipper-satin dress, lunatic, and beat the water with the long strait-jacket sleeves before rescuing a baby from the water (Moses! the Divine Child of Eleusis?), while the other women whispered together and looked righteously askance . . .

Then, inside, the group of six daemonic women working with Kalinska, who want to continue their collaboration, in symbolic white, black and red evening dresses, circled around a clock face, looking, as women have had to, through another medium – here, a bandaged mirror/window – into worlds within and without, playing with ritual objects and fighting, loving, despairing, hating, to climax and reprieve, as Kalinska tightened one thread – 'Remember the circle' – and Susan Bassnett the other, with her improvised archetypal narrative.

The next sequence built up a lot of tension but went on too long. To the rhythmic striking, by Lica, of rock on rock, four women wound and unwound, but stayed attached to, the bed-rock of existence (childbed, marriage-bed, deathbed), the earth, Gaea. Simultaneously, Krukowska darted across the playing area and Hughes Jones and Chadwick sang, in counterpoint, a composition by Chadwick about our mother: 'it is a silent song . . . sing it, sing it; it is a hidden thing . . . bind it, bind it; it is a bleeding wound . . . love it, love it'.

Another sequence, woven by Atka Ambrova from Theatre on a String, Czechoslovakia, provided a rare and welcome note of surreal humour and fun. In dream-time, several diners, sitting on non-existent chairs, fenced with knives and tried to eat objects (dream hamburgers, for instance) which arrived – or not – via the roof from which they were all suspended, their flight controlled by Ambrova.

Passing quickly by the Triple Goddess Fates (first night) spinning from a suspended mermaid-like figure (of the White Goddess, Aphrodite, creator–goddess, Eurynome, Tiamat of Sumerian myth?) we were in the room of time and the river, facing sands of time. Here, on this bank and shoal of time I thought I saw a butterfly (Hughes Jones) jump . . . certainly

several performers played the fool with time and poked fun at Magdalena and themselves – for instance, Rona Lee, visual artist, blind and dressed in a ballet skirt of Magdalena leaflets. Lindberg was, as usual, very funny physically, demanding to know where the fish was (*Hésitations 3*) and then starting to swim on top of a box.

I was very shocked and moved, the first night, by Kaquet's appearance, naked, as the mad Ophelia with weeds entangled in her hair and flowing down her (and our) beautiful and vulnerable female body. She slowly advanced along the sand, writhed, turned, and retreated, to a speech pre-recorded: 'I always thought that I loved you so much, Daddy, but sometimes I have to beg your pardon because I am so happy without you; I am so happy because you are dead.'

After a tender and farcical meeting, mid-stream, between an ageing Mary (Ambrova) and a heavily-pregnant Joseph (Aniksdal), presented as Andy Capp at the seaside, we were ushered back into the first arena for the final re-enactment: The Last Supper. Hughes Jones sang us out, the second night, simply, fittingly, in Welsh.[17]

20. Discussion between visual artists – Kari Furre, Gerd Christiansen and Cinzia Mascherin at Magdalena '86

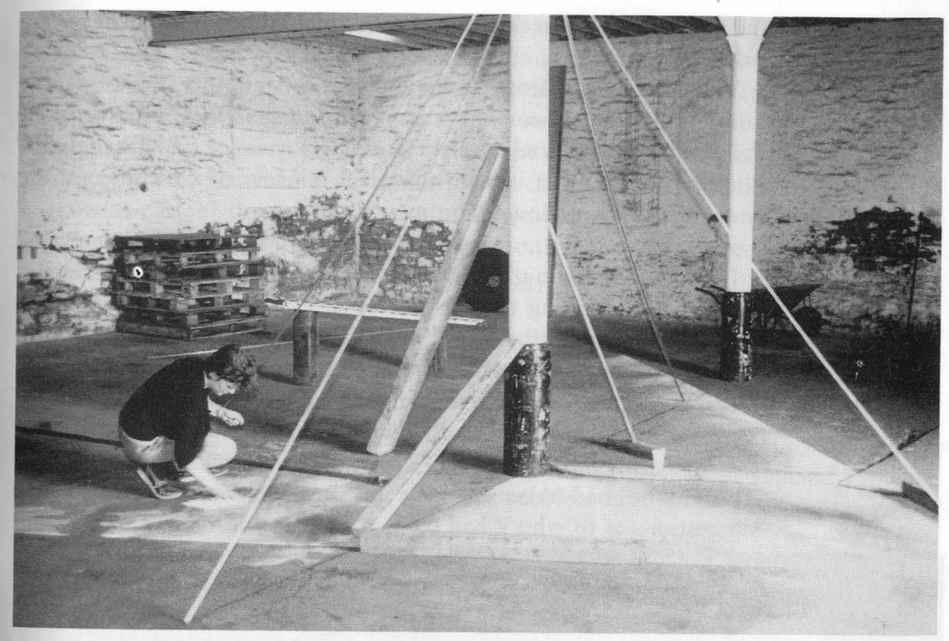
Strength, Silence and Unresolved Doubts

On the final day of Magdalena '86 a general discussion took place, during which everyone who had been in any way involved in the second phase, including one man, Richard Gough, artistic director of the Cardiff Laboratory Theatre, made a short statement. Even those whose later reassessments of what had happened were more negative offered positive feedback in that discussion. There was a great deal of emotion, and some very strong feelings were expressed. Two recurrent images kept appearing in the statements of very varied length made by all the participants – imagery and terminology of *strength* and of *voicelessness and silence*. References were frequently made to the 'strength' of the joint work, to the 'strength' of the feelings of friendship and solidarity that had developed during the three weeks, to the 'strength' of women that was finally allowed to appear in the absence of men. But equally, there were many references to women's silence, to the way in which some appeared never to have found a voice, the way in which some women had effectively silenced others even within an all-woman context.

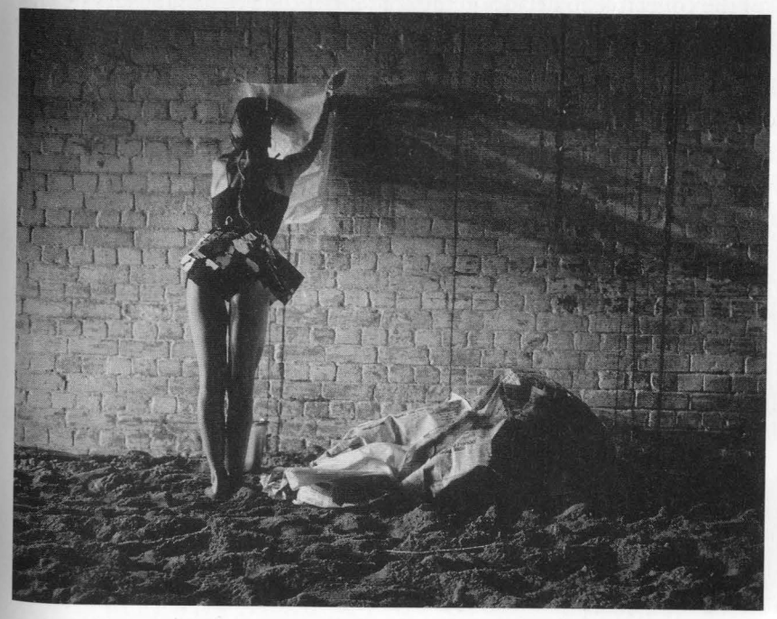
This double imagery of strength and silence links the Magdalena work to the ongoing debates on feminine aesthetics, and it is interesting to see how this polarity came clearly to the surface. Hélène Cixous, describing women both as stormy and turbulent and as repressed and gagged, argues that women have never had their turn to speak. She goes on to add:

> It is impossible to *define* a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded – which doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system; it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination. It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate.[18]

Significantly, since she wrote those words in 1975, Hélène Cixous has turned to theatre as a mode of expression, working closely with the director Adriane Mnouchkine in Paris. Theatre, for all the problems of shaping that it imposes, nevertheless seems to offer some of



21. Jennie Spiers at work in the Potato Factory



22. Rona Lee in the final performance, Magdalena '86

the possibilities of breaking into new ground that Cixous believes are essential for women.

The final Magdalena discussion revealed another aspect of the whole question of women's creative language. Without exception, the feeling was voiced that the final performance had been disappointing. Looking at it from the point of view of a member of the audience, Richard Gough commented:

> I came away last night disappointed. I wanted to see something that was struggling to say something . . . I went in open to listen, but I didn't hear anything. I don't think that's just because I'm a man. The central metaphor of the performance was the search for a voice. What was disturbing was that I saw the movement of the jaws, but I didn't hear that voice at all.[19]

Those who had taken part in the performance offered various suggestions as to why it had seemed such an anti-climax – there had not been enough time to prepare anything really worthwhile; it had been difficult to establish a comfortable working method, with so many women involved; there had been no serious attempt on the part of the collective to decide on the content of the performance, so it was assembled out of many disparate bits and pieces; the pressure of having to show something distorted the work of the last week and unbalanced it. Jenny Spiers stated simply that 'the performance was the least rich thing we did'. But in contrast to these negative assessments of the performance work, again and again the women stressed how much they had gained both personally and professionally from the work in progress during the whole Festival. In other words, whilst the final product was generally held to be inadequate, the process of creating work together was regarded as a uniquely enriching experience.

In her very useful essay, 'Is there a Feminine Aesthetic?', Silvia Bovenschen, the West German feminist theorist, makes some important suggestions:

> I believe that feminine artistic production takes place by means of a complicated process involving conquering and reclaiming, appropriating and formulating, as well as forgetting and subverting. . . . If women have different assumptions with regard to their sensory approach, their relationship to matter and

> material, their perception, their experience, their means of processing tactile, visual and accoustic stimuli, their spatial orientation and temporal rhythm – and all these things are what aesthetics meant at one time, according to its original definition as a theory of sensory perception – then one could logically expect to find these things expressed in special forms of mimetic transformation. But it will be nearly impossible to find categorical evidence for this changed relationship: reality is not that logical and there is no female cosmology either.[20]

Silvia Bovenschen cites Lucy Lippard, whose discussion of feminine art forms raises the question of how best to express feminine sensitivity, whether through fragmented forms or unity, through particular shapes or types of texture. Lippard notes that the images created by women are superficial indicators of more fundamental differences between the sexes, but again the problem here is that the

23. Atka Ambrova as the old woman who became Mistress of Ceremonies in the final performance, Magdalena '86

difference is undefined and unspoken, hinted at by the work but impossible to define in concrete terms. The contrast between the Magdalena discussion of the working process and its final product bears out precisely Lucy Lippard's dichotomy between the instinctively felt and the actual result of trying to express that feeling in imagery. Silvia Bovenschen sums up the situation:

> Is there a feminine aesthetic? Certainly, there is, if one is talking about *aesthetic awareness* and *modes of sensory perception*. Certainly not, if one is talking about an unusual variant of artistic production or about a painstakingly constructed theory of art. Women's break with the formal, intrinsic laws of a given medium, the release of their imagination – these are unpredictable for an art with feminist intentions.[21]

Magdalena '86 ended with nothing resolved. As an experiment, it was magnificent, attempting to do something completely new and explore new ground. In doing this, all kinds of problems appeared. It was very clear that the problem of power structuring, even in an all-woman situation, remained unsolved. The performers, whether consciously aware of what happened or not, came to the fore and found ways of speaking that were not available in the same way to visual artists and technicians. Despite all the good intentions, traditional theatre hierarchies prevailed. Moreover, the fact that many of the performers were more experienced than some of the younger women involved in creating the environment for the Festival caused another form of hierarchy to be established. The criteria of the outside world, which some had perhaps idealistically believed could be abandoned for three weeks, constantly crept back in. And yet, at the same time, despite the clashes between idealism and harsh practical necessity, strong bonds of friendship developed between many of the women, and some felt sufficiently supported to take greater risks with their own personal work.

Notes

1. Mina Kaylan, 'Magdalena '86,' *Performance*, No. 44/45 (Nov.–Dec. 1986), 44–5.

2. Jill Greenhalgh, document sent to participants of Magdalena '86.

3. Jill Greenhalgh, 'Magdalena,' *Performance*, No. 42 (July – Aug. 1986), pp. 32–3.

4. Cinzia Mascherin, private statement for Magdalena '86, Aug. 1986.

5. Sandra Salmaso, private statement for Magdalena '86, Aug. 1986.

6. See note 4 above.

7. Georgiana Berry, private letter to Magdalena, 29 Aug. 1986.

8. Diane Speakman, 'The Next Stage: Devaluation, Revaluation and After' in *Themes in Drama*, No. 11 (*Women in Theatre*) (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989).

9. Lis Hughes Jones, private statement for Magdalena, Aug. 1986.

10. Hélène Cixous, from *La jeune née*, in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds, *New French Feminisms* (Brighton, Harvester, 1981), pp. 90–8.

11. Diane Speakman, 'The Next Stage: Devaluation, Revaluation and After.'

12. Kari Furre, open letter to Magdalena organisers, 12 Jan. 1986.

13. Rona Lee, letter to the author, undated, 1987.

14. Mandy White, letter to Jill Greenhalgh, 23 Nov. 1986.

15. Katy Dymoke, letter to Jill Greenhalgh, 12 Nov. 1987.

16. Ibid.

17. All quotations taken from reports on Magdalena '86 sent to Jill Greenhalgh and the author.

18. Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds, *New French Feminisms* (Brighton, Harvester, 1981), pp. 245–64.

19. Richard Gough, author's transcript of the final Magdalena discussion, August 1986.

20. Silvia Bovenschen, 'Is There a Feminine Aesthetic?', in Gisela Escher, ed., *Feminist Aesthetics* (London, The Women's Press, 1985), pp. 23–51.

21. Ibid.

III
The Magdalena Project

The Search for New Directions

Reactions to Magdalena '86 were mixed. Press coverage, though slow at first, increased as major international theatre journals carried articles examining the work of the Festival, which rapidly came to be known simply as 'the first Magdalena'.[1] Many of the participants did not write immediately to the organisers but held back for a period of reflection, and significantly, some of the more negative assessments were written once the period of immediate enthusiasm had died down. As with any intense working experience in which a restricted group of people is in close contact for a limited time, excluded from the outside world, it was difficult to explain adequately to others what had taken place. Accusations that the whole event had been simply a kind of self-indulgent encounter-group session began to surface, along with the suggestion that the whole Festival had been wrongly conceived, along elitist lines, and that the vast majority of women working in theatre had not been affected in any way.

The decision to transform the whole enterprise into a permanent Project had therefore two distinct points of departure. On the one hand, the organising committee felt that the initial venture had been a great success, and the response of funding bodies to the final reports seemed to them to bear this out. On the other hand, the accusations of racism and elitism and the inadequacy of the final performance made it more urgent to extend the range of women involved in Magdalena and to attempt alternative forms of meeting. In September 1987, at a three-day conference on the subject of 'A Women's Language in Theatre?', the Magdalena Project was established on a permanent basis in Wales at Chapter, Cardiff.

The need for a more broadly based structure and for clearer objectives had become apparent during the summer of 1987, when a

small-scale Magdalena meeting was held at the Nordiskteaterlaboratorium in Holstebro, Denmark. A group consisting principally of women who had taken part in Magdalena '86 and a few others interested in finding out about the work came together for a short period. What emerged straight away was a difference in discourse between the women who had been part of the first Magdalena and the others. This was especially clear with regard to Zofia Kalinska's work. In Cardiff, the Magic Circle group had become an autonomous unit, and already by July 1987 plans were well under way for the formation of an *ad hoc* company that would continue to work together and create a performance. But in Holstebro, with a combination of women who had already started work with Kalinska and women who had never worked with her before, it was obvious that the two groups could not combine forces. Magdalena had started with an idealistic, some would say utopian, belief in the capacity of women to come together and share their lives and work. Differences of culture, language, race, class, age and sexual propensity would, in this idealistic vision, be subordinate to the commonality of women's experience and the assumption that a group of women together would create a sympathetic environment, rather than a destructive one. Julia Varley, organiser of the Danish workshop, described her hopes for what would come out of the meeting in the following terms:

> 'What was most important was the morning work sessions together. I can imagine a next Magdalena meeting developing from them, with each participant leading a session in turn and creating a starting point for the next, without having to start from the idea of the end, the performance, but from the beginning, our own need to explore in darkness.' This is how I concluded an article written after the experience of the 'Magdalena Festival of Women in Experimental Theatre' of August 1986.
>
> The words spoken during the last day of the Festival, in meetings, speeches and personal conversations, expressed a need to continue what had started, but also a need for time to understand. Time to just let the very strong, exciting and confusing outcomes of those days settle, in order to clarify the new steps to be taken in view of meeting again.
>
> It was suggested that encounters at a less official level,

> involving fewer women, could be organised, to continue asking the questions and give deeper outlines to the many themes which had emerged, before confronting them again all together.
>
> Why and how women working in theatre can contribute even more strongly and differently to new directions in their field of work and give form and light to the hidden world of women's expression in theatre are basic issues that 'The Magdalena Project' is continuing to deal with in all its different initiatives which have flowered from last year's Festival.
>
> And these questions are also at the base of the aspects on which I would like to concentrate during the two periods of practical work I propose.
>
> The two aspects being: (1) the creative process itself, or in other words, 'work on the way of working', and (2) elements of performance production.[2]

The first Holstebro workshop in July 1987, though enjoyable for many, did not appear to have moved on at all from the work of the first Magdalena. Rather it exposed a flaw in the idealistic thinking that became even more apparent in the first of the two Cardiff workshop conferences which asked the question 'A Women's Language in Theatre?'. It is significant that this title was posed as a question in the first place, rather than as a statement. At the first Magdalena there had been a separate session on Women's Theatre Language, as though it were a given fact rather than a controversial suggestion.

The Cardiff conference in September 1987 was structured very straightforwardly. Four women led working sessions, and there were general meetings and discussion groups. At the final plenary session, a whole range of problems came to the surface, many of which had been apparent all along. From transcripts of the discussions, it is possible to distinguish some recurring difficulties that many women were experiencing: the problem of exclusion from what was perceived to be an elitist inner Magdalena group consisting of those who had taken part in previous meetings, the problem of power relationships between performers and their director, the problem of talking about 'women's theatre' with its implications of common ground as opposed to 'feminist' theatre which implies a basic commitment to a political programme or specific causes, the problem of a theatre of the image as opposed to a theatre of the word and image. Once again, the question of why so few coloured women were present was raised,

and there was a heated argument about the decision of the organisers to open the workshop to men. It was pointed out that all the Magdalena meetings had been open to both sexes and that few men ever chose to attend, but many women felt that they should be excluded altogether. The tone of the discussions was extraordinarily old-fashioned, and many women commented afterwards that they felt that they were still caught up in consciousness-raising sessions of twenty years earlier. The question of whether there might or might not be a women's language in theatre was barely addressed at all.

With hindsight, it is not difficult to see why this should have happened. Central to Magdalena is the idea of unity, of bringing together women with a common interest in theatre work, regardless of age or experience. In the first Magdalena, boundaries had been drawn from the outset between the invited group of practitioners and the other women, many of whom were also experienced practitioners, who took part in the workshops during the first week. At the 1987 workshop conference, however, the boundaries were less clear, and furthermore, expectations were very high. What happened was that women of very mixed abilities and experience met and found difficulties, that might well have been easy to predict, in working closely together. While everyone, regardless of their background, was able to take part in sessions and learn from them, there was nevertheless a substantial difference between some of those who had years of professional training and experience behind them and some of those with no experience of working in theatre at all. The result was a difference in focus: some women were concerned with developing their own work and exploring ways of extending their range of technical skills, while others wanted to experience group work with other women often for the first time. In the closing debate, it became clear that many of those present did not understand the concept of theatre as a way of life, one of the fundamental presuppositions of the Third Theatre world. In the clash of opinions, the traditional theatre of the play, with its fixed rehearsal periods and its focus on public performance, met head on with the experimental theatre world of daily training sessions and incidental performances. With such major differences, the question of whether there might be a women's theatre language could not even begin to be aired.

The September 1987 conference was planned from the beginning as the first of two meetings, and the second encounter in December of the same year was very different in organisation, tone and results.

24. Zofia Kalinska's Magic Circle group

Benefitting from the problems that had arisen the first time round, the organisers decided to rethink some of the initial presuppositions. Large group discussions were ruled out, and instead participants were organised in small groups, each with their own nominated spokesperson who was to report back to the plenary meeting in a final session. Group reports were coordinated by Mara De Witt, who also established a series of specific topics for discussion and briefed the spokespersons on how to record the essential points made in each of the groups. The result of this organisation was a positive step forward: much of the vague arguing that had characterised the first conference was eliminated, and participants worked with a greater sense of purpose. Jill Greenhalgh set out the revised aims of the December conference in a publicity document sent to all participants:

> We avoid an academic approach to this huge question. We aren't expecting answers; we're using the question as a vehicle for research.
>
> An important aim this year is also to encourage a greater

dialogue between those working in the mainstream and those in alternative or experimental work. Through looking at existing work by women, by sharing methodologies, by examining form as well as content or by making new material, we are trying, practically, to reveal recurrent themes and images. Perhaps we can begin to identify some vocabulary that has some universal resonance for women – perhaps not. The work of this project is to find out. In brief, the aims are to set up opportunities for women to explore new approaches to theatre-making that more profoundly reflect their own experience rather than that of men.[3]

The programme of the second conference reflected the organisers' awareness of the changing needs of the participants. Each of the three days was carefully timetabled, and great effort was made to keep within those time limits. Participants were able to take part in different types of activity: Iben Nagel Rasmussen from the Odin Teatret gave a performance–demonstration of her work on the first day, and Cora Herrendorf and Nicoletta Zabini from the Teatro Nucleo of Ferrara gave a second performance–demonstration on the last day. Vanya Constant of 'Pauper's Carnival', Jane Bassett and Louise Rennison of 'Etheldreda' and Tanya Myers and Tamsin Griffin of 'Meeting Ground' gave short performances of their work in progress, and the South African women's company, the Vusiwe Players, presented their show *You Strike the Woman, You Strike the Rock*. In the mornings, at 8 o'clock, voice and physical warm-up sessions were run by Helen Chadwick, Claire Hughes, Ruth Posner and Mala Sikka.

The second day of the conference followed a slightly different pattern. Five all-day optional workshops were offered, and participants chose which one they wanted to follow. Lis Hughes Jones of Brith Gof offered a workshop entitled 'Women and War: Finding a Voice'. Based on her own current work in progress, *Disasters of War*, her workshop was structured around a series of questions, outlined in her programme note:

What do women have to say about war?
What has their voice been in past wars?
Is our fate always to be the grievers?
Can the voice of our resistance be strong, confident, powerful?[4]

Also central to the workshop was the use of images taken from etchings by Goya and photographic material of women in wartime situations.

Beatriz Camargo of the Colombian Teatro Itinerante del Sol entitled her workshop 'The Rose of Winds' and declared that the task of the participants was to 'discover the voiced and dance of the eight elements in the body'. The most intensive of all the workshops, Beatriz's group worked without a pause for seven hours. Interestingly, she chose not to focus on women alone in her workshop nor to start from any preconceived notions of 'the female' or 'the feminine'.

Jude Alderson, founder of the Sadista Sisters, ran a workshop on 'Women and Ensemble Theatre'. Her programme declaration began with an autobiographical statement about how she had come to work together with other women after years in what she termed 'male-orientated theatre' and had begun as a result 'to explore the female psyche and concentrate on classic themes that preoccupied women'. She proposed to work with masks and to enter into areas of unconscious possession, with a view to creating 'Epic scenes that are specifically female'.

The fourth workshop, run by Julia Pascal, was entitled 'Risk, Bravery, Fear, Confidence, Danger' and in her programme note she directly addressed the issue of a women's language in theatre: 'Are women confined to a secondary role because they have no language of their own? Is all language "men's language"?'[5] Participants were invited to bring along a piece of text and encouraged also to use languages other than English. Also text-based was the fifth workshop, a day split into two parts and run by Susan Bassnett and Deborah Levy on topics entitled respectively 'Archetype and Autobiography' and 'Writing for Performance'. This workshop aimed at enabling the participants to create pieces of text and to look at some of the problems involved in writing for performance.

The Conference was therefore a major departure from previous Magdalena meetings, in that physical work was not given prominence over voice work and work with texts, but instead there was a greater sense of integration. Moreover, just as there was an attempt to address the need to be expressed as well in the September 1987 conference for work with 'the play', so also was there an attempt to bring in more women working in mainstream theatre. Central to the first day was Phyllida Lloyd's workshop demonstration with actress Rosie Powell on 'Interpreting the Female Role in Shakespeare'.

Setting out to explore some of the choices available to performers and directors when tackling a Shakespeare production, Phyllida Lloyd addressed a series of questions including: why do so many actresses want to play Shakespearean roles, what are the traditional interpretations of the female role in Shakespeare, the crucial question of casting and the problem of casting women in men's roles and vice versa.

The existence of a large-scale session on women and Shakespeare at a Magdalena meeting clearly shows how the emphasis had changed in accordance with the needs expressed by former participants. From its beginnings as a place of encounter for women working primarily in experimental theatre, Magdalena was transforming itself into a forum for debate and practical exchanges amongst women working in many different kinds of theatre.

If the Magdalena organisers had taken to heart some of the misgivings articulated at the meeting in September 1987, they had also been affected by the impact of the second Holstebro Magdalena, that had taken place on 16–25 October of the same year. Organised by Julia Varley with the title 'Siren: A Woman's Voice in Theatre', the workshop was dedicated entirely to practical investigation of women's voices. Only five women took part in Siren: Brigitte Cirla, Jill Greenhalgh, Helen Chadwick and Julia Varley, who had all been present at the first Magdalena, and Francine Romain, from Guadaloupe, who had trained as an opera singer. Explaining the origins and aims of the workshop, Julia Varley claimed that after the July Magdalena there was a definite need for 'the different reality of a much smaller group', for something 'following different lines, smaller, more secret, deeper'.[6]

Despite the references in letters, reviews and other testimonies of the first Magdalena to the new experience of hearing so many women's voices, it was in fact the case that voice work had been consigned to a rather more marginal position in the final performance. Despite the huge success of Ida Kelarova's group singing and of the voice workshops and performances by women such as Helen Chadwick, Kozana Lucca, Lis Hughes Jones and Brigitte Cirla, the final performance consisted primarily of a string of visual images. The discussion of the last day had emphasised the word 'silence', and yet in retrospect what seems to have happened is that the group of women who came together to make a performance actually succeeded in silencing one another. Given all the possibilities that they

had at their disposal, the fact that the female voice should have been heard too little in the final performance is a striking incongruity. Certainly Julia Varley, well known for her work on silence and stillness, felt that it was time for a group of women under the Magdalena umbrella to meet and engage directly with the issue of sound. In her introductory statement she notes the central importance

25. *Netta Plotsky in the final performance, Magdalena '86*

of voice and singing in previous Magdalena meetings, but significantly refers to voices in their non-theatrical context:

> The voices of women talking in the kitchen, in the changing rooms, round a table are impressed in me as something special and exciting. The secrets, the gossip, the cries, the songs at work have brought us together.
>
> In theatre it is still the area of mystery where all can be discovered, where experience counts, but rules are not written. The unknown, the curiosity to explore, the growing confidence, the attitude needed towards this research are the same found in the Magdalena Project's need to change and say something new in theatre.
>
> To find our voice: our own talking, singing voice and the voice which concretely expresses what is still hidden. The voice belonging to me and the voice belonging to a woman.[7]

Significantly, in September 1989, Magdalena plans to hold a Voice Festival.

By the end of 1987, with the Magdalena Project firmly established after a series of meetings in Wales and in Denmark, new lines of emphasis had also begun to emerge. The old charge of elitism amongst a closed group of alternative performers had been countered by the widening of Magdalena's aims and participants. Work on the creation of visual theatre was set alongside serious voice work and a new emphasis on text-based theatre, both with regard to newly written texts and traditional texts from the classic repertoire. Moreover, with the establishment of a permanent base for the Project in Cardiff, it became possible for the first time to discuss the setting up of an archive on women's theatre and the establishment of an international advisory committee for the furtherance of work by women in theatre.

In January 1988, Stacy Klein of Double Edge Theatre, Boston, organised a workshop conference called simply 'Electra', but advertised as an event pertaining to the Magdalena Project. Although the organisers of the previous Magdalena meetings were not part of the Boston organisational team, it is nevertheless an indication of the international status so suddenly and so rapidly acquired by the Project that Stacy Klein should have chosen to link her workshop specifically to Magdalena. Plans began to be discussed for future Magdalena

26. Kozana Lucca's workshop, showing the Beasts in action

meetings: in Argentina, proposed by Kozana Lucca and in Colombia for the anniversary celebrations of the discovery of the Americas in 1992 by Beatriz Camargo. More immediately, two further Magdalena conferences were proposed: a meeting in July 1988 on theatre and motherhood at Aradeo in the south of Italy organised by Silvia Ricciardelli of the Koreja Community Theatre Project and a meeting in July 1989 at Porsgrunn, Norway, on women as directors, organised by Geddy Aniksdal and Anne Erichsen of the Grenland Friteater.

Mothers and Directors

A great deal of controversy had been generated at the first Magdalena meeting over the question of the power relationship between performers and director. Jill Greenhalgh had specifically refused to take on the role of director for the final performance, despite being organiser of the whole enterprise, and the task of coordinating the various pieces of work had been taken on by Geddy Aniksdal and Gerd Christiansen. The relationship between the performers and the

two volunteer directors was not altogether a happy one, and in subsequent workshop conferences the issue had again emerged, particularly when women used to working as directors were running workshops with participants whose experience of theatre was more limited.

In one sense, the problem of directorial power that kept surfacing at the Magdalena meetings was a direct off-shoot of the debates on the same topic that had characterised early feminist movements in the 1960s and 1970s.

At that time, one solution was proposed in the development of collaborative structures, co-operatives and communal decision-taking. Many women's journals set up editorial collectives, where all articles were read by all editors and assessed by the group. The idea of a 'leader', of one individual who took control and directed others, was unpalatable. Nevertheless, along with this ideological position went the process of rediscovering women's history, of establishing lists of names of 'great' women from the past, women whose successes in all kinds of fields had been forgotten. So, on the one hand, there was a feeling that the idea of collective rather than individual leadership was desirable, and on the other hand, there was the emergence of a growing list of names of key figures, women who began to serve as models and guru-figures for other women.

This kind of confusion, deriving from a desire to reject authoritarian structures, while at the same time looking towards the security of pioneering mother-figures from the past, has provided material for a long debate that is still far from resolved. In the theatre, that debate takes on special significance, especially in the West, where the role of the director has tended to increase in importance, and the boundary between director and performers is strongly marked. At the time of writing, the Porsgrunn Magdalena has yet to take place, but it seems highly likely that it will try to confront what has become one of the most problematic questions for women working in theatre.

The Porsgrunn Magdalena has been entitled A Room of One's Own and proposes to bring together 30 women from several countries. The preliminary statement, sent out to proposed participants contrasts the aims of the 1989 meeting with previous Magdalenas:

> In earlier Magdalenas it was important to create an open structure in which all proposals could be tried out. As a result of these experiences we feel that the time is right for a more rigid

> structure in which we give skilled instructors and actresses the opportunity to enter more deeply into the material and work with definite aims towards a result.

The organisers also state very clearly that they intend this meeting to be principally for Scandinavian participants. In this respect, too, it differs from previous Magdalena meetings in its unabashed partisanship for what the organisers see as a marginalised group of nations.

The document contrasts what is termed 'an open structure' with the proposal for a new, 'more rigid structure' and suggests that only by passing through the experience of the former has it become clear that there is a need for the latter. It is tempting to look at the progression of Magdalenas from the first festival in 1986 and to suggest that as participants have acquired greater confidence through the continued exchange of ideas and practical skills, so they have moved away from what some felt was excessive idealism towards more specifically determined aims. In other words, and using the imagery of motherhood that has pervaded much of the discourse of Magdalena meetings, the childbirth was successful; the infant has gone through its first phase of discovery, exploration, conflict, tantrums and rejection of authority and is now looking for some more coherent structuring within which to locate herself.

The imagery of motherhood was felt by Silvia Ricciardelli in particular to be central to any discussion of women's role in theatre. When she came to organise her workshop in July 1988, she chose as the final title: Donne, Bambini e Teatro (Women, Children and Theatre). In the document sent out to participants, she notes that all the Magdalena meetings have been inspired in some respect by the personal priorities of the organisers and states her own primary concerns:

> The Aradeo meeting derives from the question I have asked myself as to whether it is possible to reconcile 'mothers, children and theatre'. And I wanted to explore the possibilities of our relationship with childhood and our professional development. Motherhood is not just the topic for the workshop, but it is also the spirit in which I have tried to conceive and realise the workshop. I have left it to grow and gradually develop through the network of collaborations and difficulties encountered in the process.

The Aradeo workshop brought together a group of women from a variety of backgrounds: some from the professional theatre, some from education, some who were social workers specialising in children's problems and some from Italian feminist organisations. Silvia Ricciardelli explained the rationale behind her choice of participants: 'Magdalena '88 on Motherhood is not solely for those women who have children; it is for all those women for whom the choice either to reject motherhood or to become mothers has resulted in a specific change of direction in their work.'

Some of the participants did bring children with them, though others chose to leave their children behind, and as Silvia Ricciardelli had planned, some of the women came to discuss the dilemma of whether or not to choose to have children in the unstable milieu of small theatre companies.

The workshop was organised around practical sessions, workshop demonstrations and lectures. Two theatre historians from the University of Bologna, Eugenia Casini Ropa and Laura Mariani, discussed the question of female performers and motherhood in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, pointing out how the actress had traditionally occupied a special position of moral ambiguity in Western society. On the one hand, the actress enjoyed a freedom of movement denied to most other nineteenth-century women, and consequently often became both the object of envy for those denied their independence and the object of desire for those who equated the actress with the prostitute. On the other hand, a large number of actresses were forced into deeply ambiguous family relationships, often going to great lengths to conceal their pregnancies or to raise their children away from the theatre. The case of Eleonora Duse, the great Italian actress, is an excellent example of this kind of ambiguity. Herself the daughter of itinerant performers, Duse first appeared on stage at the age of four, and later in life her prime motivation as a mother seems to have been to prevent her daughter from following in her footsteps. Duse's drive to see her daughter raised as a respectable woman resulted in long periods of separation from her, as the child Enrichetta was sent away to convent schools, and Duse seems to have lived her maternity as an anguished conflict between a desire for bourgeois stability and her professional life. Prior to the birth of her daughter, there was the additional grief of a dead baby, born illegitimately when Duse was still very young, a fact that she tried hard to keep secret.

The Aradeo Magdalena thus moved the Magdalena project a stage further, by introducing from the outset an historical dimension. The lecture–demonstration by Susan Bassnett, entitled 'Anthropological Fragments' continued this line, and a furious debate followed the insertion into this lecture of a brief provocative sketch by Cora Herrendorf, depicting the boring daily routine of the Virgin Mary as she cycled home with the shopping, tried to calm a screaming Baby, prepared chicken for Joseph's dinner and reconciled all this with the Divine Will. Bassnett and Herrendorf raised the question of representational taboos by introducing the image of the Supreme Mother, and opinion was divided as to whether such an extreme interpretation could be acceptable in theatre terms.

Debate also raged around the decision by Silvia Ricciardelli to work with a group of children, with a view to making a performance on the last evening of the workshop in the central square of Aradeo at a rally in support of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, the Argentinian women's organisation founded as a result of the desperate endeavours of hundreds of women to trace their sons and daughters who were abducted and in many cases tortured to death by the military dictatorship of the mid-1970s. Silvia's group consisted of five local children, Silvia and Giuseppe Bonuso, Roberto Tarantino, Silvia Longo and Robert dell'Anna, and was extended on the first day to include Vanessa Bassnett and Tchoubin Pourhousseini, the 10-year-old daughter and son of two of the participants. The decision to make work with the children an integral part of the five-day workshop was defended on the grounds that by working practically with children, participants would be forced to rethink their relationship to them. As an attempt to make this clear, in one session the children were chosen as directors and the women instructed to follow the children's guidance.

The counter-argument to Silvia Ricciardelli's view, expressed principally by Serena Sartori of the Milanese Teatro del Sole and one of Italy's most experienced women in the field of children's theatre, was that by introducing children the issue of theatre and motherhood was actually made more obscure. After the session with children as directors, Serena Sartori attacked simplistic notions of power relationships, arguing that all those involved in the work had known from the outset that the children had had no real authority and that the exercise had been grossly patronising. She also pointed out that the children had seemed bewildered and less than happy at being given

27. Nominatae Filiae: *Gerd Christiansen as a daemonic angel*

their supposed power and that children required the security of well-defined power relationships with adults.

Reviewing the workshop in *Noi Donne*, the journalist Maria Antonietta Saracino declared that she had been moved both by the final presentation of songs and music in the village square and by the sight of women from so many different backgrounds struggling with the 'incessant, though diverse rhythms' of motherhood and work in the theatre.[8] Her article discusses the dichotomy between the impulse to create children and the impulse to create theatre, and she refers to what Silvia Ricciardelli calls her own uneasiness with the compromise brought about by either a combination of the two or a rejection of one of them.

The Aradeo Magdalena lasted five days only and was full of tensions and contradictions, but in many respects it marked another stage in the growth of the Magdalena Project. The theme of motherhood and theatre was from the start an impossible one, and it was obvious that nothing definitive would be resolved. Nevertheless, the workshop did bring into the open the whole question of the relationship between the maternal drive and the drive for artistic improvement, a question that has been on the agenda of women's theatre collectives for the past twenty years and has been tackled in very many ways, from the extreme position of the Roy Hart Theatre in the 1960s that banned all female performers from ever becoming pregnant on pain of expulsion from the company, to the liberal collective position of Footsbarn, who travel the world with an ever-growing band of children and employ professional teachers to travel with them. The workshop also enabled women who have chosen not to have children to talk openly about their feelings of ambiguity and to compare experiences with women who have chosen to combine the two distinct needs of work and maternity.

Most importantly, the Aradeo Magdalena introduced an historical dimension to the workshop. Alongside the practical sessions, the voice work led by Nasdrin Pourhousseini, the demonstrations, discussions and performances, there were also talks putting the whole issue of theatre and motherhood into an historical context. Time and again, the debates could be located in an ongoing diachronic process, as women in the 1980s wrestled with the same, still unresolved problems confronting their predecessors in earlier theatres.

Nominatae Filiae

In January 1988, the hopes for a Magdalena production finally came to fruition, as Zofia Kalinska's *ad hoc* company of women met in Holstebro to start a three-month working period devising the performance known as *Nominatae Filiae*. The establishment of the company had been an arduous process, and right up to the last minute there were doubts about its viability.

The original Magic Circle group that had begun work with Zofia Kalinska at the first Magdalena consisted of Daria Anfelli, Brigitte Cirla, Maria Consagra, Anne Erichsen, Brigitte Kaquet and Michelle Kramers as performers and Susan Bassnett as writer. Through the whole of 1987, while Brigitte Kaquet in particular struggled to obtain funding, the original group began to alter, as one after another found herself unable to agree on the length of the working period. The fundamental division came from the different emphases placed upon the work itself. Some wanted to insist on a three-month period that would be followed by a public performance and an international tour, while others felt that it would be best to conceive of the three-month

period as a form of research and that the pressures of creating a performance would simply reintroduce the tensions of the final days of the first Magdalena. It was argued that, although a three-month working period might seem like a long time in traditional theatre for the preparation of a show, in experimental theatre it was far too short, since during that time everything had to be first devised and then rehearsed. It was pointed out that many Third Theatre companies take up to a year to create a performance.

The decision to go ahead with a three-month working period followed by a tour was finally taken because of the need to comply with the conditions established by the funding bodies, which required public presentation of the work. This decision meant that several women were unable to take part, since although they had negotiated a period of absence of three months from their own companies, they felt that they could not enter into an open-ended commitment and consider a tour at a later date. Others left because they were uneasy with the idea of a tour and would have preferred to take part in a research project rather than a commercial venture. In the end, only one woman remained from the original group of performers. When the company came together in January 1988, its members were Zofia Kalinska (Poland) as director, Susan Bassnett (Britain) as writer, Gerd Christiansen (Denmark), Jill Greenhalgh (Britain), Maria Teresa Hincapie (Colombia), Brigitte Kaquet (Belgium), Adele Saleem (Britain/Afghanistan), Isabel Ubeda (Spain) and Celia West (New Zealand).

The one clear starting point for the company was Zofia Kalinska's stated intention about what she wanted to achieve. Her work at previous Magdalenas had focused on the notion of the 'daemonic woman', exploring the conflict and aggression inherent in a series of female archetypes such as Medea, Clytemnestra, Electra or Phaedra. In her notes on directing that were circulated among the company, she explained that:

> The object of the work is to explore feminine archetype. The circle of women represent different archetypal characters. I feel I see them returning to each after their deaths and repeating their lives, particularly those moments which they remember most strongly, the moments of great pain or greatest happiness. They will never be able to rid themselves of such memories, however many times they are born.

> In the ritualised actions of daily life, I want to include what Susan Bassnett has described as the psychological interaction between the women as they move through space together. My working method is based on a long period of preparation, and it is impossible to give precise details of that preparatory work in advance because the rehearsal period is the time when the piece actually takes its shape. The best I can do is state that the purpose of the work is to develop and explore feminine archetypes and to show the beauty, weakness and daemonic power of all women as perceived by another woman, myself.
>
> I believe this is an ideal time for new explorations by women in theatre and that women are uniquely placed to be able to try things out for themselves in a way that would not be possible for men.[9]

The company worked closely together with the director and writer in the early stages of preparation. A crucial first step was the need for each performer to find her own archetype. Through extensive reading, discussion and investigation of representational images of women, in particular a study of the work of women painters through the ages, figures began to emerge. Maria Teresa Hincapie centred her work on Medea, Adele Saleem focused on Salome, Brigitte Kaquet chose two figures, the eternal bride from Dicken's *Great Expectations*, Miss Havisham, and Faust's abandoned lover, Marguerite. The other three women experienced problems in finding an archetypal figure, and for the first weeks of intensive improvisations and study periods they worked with a set of images rather than with a character and a story. Celia West concentrated on female mystics, Gerd Christiansen on female suicides and Jill Greenhalgh on women artists.

The process of creating a piece of theatre from scratch is a highly complex one and virtually impossible to describe in any sensible way. Zofia Kalinska's directorial method consisted in lengthy practical sessions, during which certain rules were rigidly observed: all performers had to change into clothing in the three basic colours of the performance, red, white and black, and casual clothes were not allowed in the rehearsal room. By this means, Kalinska argued, the ritual aspect of the work would be reinforced. The second basic rule was the requirement of all performers to begin whatever actions they later developed by walking in a circle, moving progressively past six objects: a bed, a chair, a mirror, a window, a bowl of water and a

28. Nominatae Filiae: *Two moments of interaction between archtypal figures*

broom, again to establish a sense of ritual in physical terms. What Kalinska most wanted to avoid was a form of theatre based on psychological realism, so the performers were required to approach their archetypes not through standard construction of character but instead through a series of situations into which the archetypal character was suddenly and unexpectedly thrown. For those performers who had never worked in this way before and who had always had the security of a script and a character, this proved extremely difficult.

The common language of the company was English, but since all the women came from different countries and since this had been a prime factor in the process of selecting them, care had to be taken to ensure that the performers worked in their own languages. Sometimes this produced striking results, as for example when one of Adele Saleem's pieces of text, taken from Oscar Wilde's *Salome*, was performed in Persian, the language of her childhood. Gerd Christiansen, who had been unable to find a single archetypal figure on which to work, began to mix languages and so found a metaphor for the sense of cultural displacement that characterised her suicidal figures. In later stages of rehearsal she began working with Danish archetypes and discovered the Little Mermaid, the woman who transformed herself into human shape out of love and who brought about her own death after a long period of suffering.

The pathways to the creation of archetypal figures were varied. In some cases the performers had clear ideas of what they wanted to do, in other cases archetypes were suggested by Bassnett and Kalinska. The decision to build the performance around the figure of a woman artist in search of material came as a result of Jill Greenhalgh's difficulties in finding any mythical female figure upon which to focus. The archetype of the Artist was finally agreed upon, and after that came the decision to structure the whole performance around the Artist.

Towards the end of January a crisis developed with the departure of Maria Teresa Hincapie, who felt unwilling to work with the theme of violence proposed by the director. The loss of Maria Teresa left the company without a Medea, and because she felt strongly that Medea was an essential character, Zofia Kalinska moved Celia West from her work with St Teresa into the role of Medea.

An early draft script explains the basic structure of the piece and the inter-relationship between the women:

An Artist's room somewhere in Europe at the close of the last century, the age of the New Woman, when the process of questioning the traditional roles of women has just begun. The Artist is one of those troubled women who cannot accept the place assigned to her in society, but whose dreams of an alternative are unshaped and nebulous. She could be many such women, Akne and Colette, Paula Modersohn Becker and Elizabeth Siddall, Virginia Woolf, Isadora Duncan, Rosa Luxemburg, Eleonora Duse. This Artist is a painter. Her room is filled with unfinished canvases, clothes piled up, confusion and chaos.

The room contains very little furniture, only the bare essentials for survival. There is a bed, a table, a chair, a mirror. There is a bowl of water and a broom. A dusty window gives a little light from the outside world. These objects are spaced one from another in such a way as to form a circle around the stage. They are solid and real, but mounted on castors so that during the performance they can be moved by the performers as the room changes its appearance with new lives that come to possess it.

The Artist was thus set apart from the other archetypes, just as Jill Greenhalgh had remained apart from the other performers during the first six weeks of work because of her failure to find a suitable role. In this way, the working process undergone within the company found its means of expression in the actual performance.

With the set established as the Artist's studio, the other women became invaders of that space:

The five women are archetypal images from an imaginary past. Summoned somehow, mysteriously, they have come despite themselves into the Artist's room, not knowing what their task might be. They have come from distant memory and now, in time present, they are searching for a clue, for a place, an image, a moment that will give them an identity again. The five women are:

Medea, who destroyed what she loved best of all, her children.

Salome, who ordered the death of John the Baptist and so destroyed holiness and the man she desired together.

29. Nominatae Filiae*: Celia West as Medea*

The Little Mermaid, whose desire for life on earth led to her own self-destruction.

Miss Havisham, who spent a life in death, walled up in an empty house, plotting revenge on all men because of her own betrayal.

Cassandra, the Trojan prophetess who was cursed always to speak the truth but never to be believed.

But because these five women are from the unformed world of the imagination, they are not locked in a single self. Through Medea runs the story of other queens whom life betrayed – Phaedra and her lust for a forbidden man, her stepson; Clytemnestra who killed her husband in a fatal act of revenge; Hippolyta, the Amazon, brought back to Greece in chains to be

a bride. Through Salome runs the story of other child-women, caught in the act of reaching for the impossible, Alice in Wonderland falling down the rabbit hole, Iphigenia baring her throat to her father's knife, Antigone stamping her foot at Creon's law. Through the Mermaid runs the story of all those women whose search ended in darkness, the un-named women of asylums and convents, the anchorite walled up by her sisters, the rejected wife sealed up to go mad in the attic. Through Miss Havisham runs the story of the women who waited vainly, of Marguerite and her godless lover, Faust, of Mariana in the moated grange, of Tannhäuser's poor Elisabeth, of the Sleeping Beauty wrapped in cobwebs, waiting for a prince who never comes. And through the story of Cassandra runs the motif of silence and constraint that has been the lot of women in all cultures and for centuries. Unable to be heard, her words are lost as soon as she utters them.

As Medea, Salome, the Mermaid, Miss Havisham and Cassandra enter, they begin to circle, from mirror to chair, from bed to window, following the arrangement of the props and forming a circle. As they touch the objects, vague memories begin to shape themselves. At each place they pause, trying to remember, and so each point of focus in the room becomes a station on the Calvary that is each woman's remembered pain. Gradually the women find a place that is meaningful to each of them (the bed for Medea, the window for Miss Havisham, the mirror for Salome, the basin for Cassandra and for the Mermaid a space somewhere in the centre, but closest to the chair. As the performance progresses the women will work closely with each of these props, thereby establishing a clear relationship with and function of the prop in their individual stories.)

Nominatae Filiae opened at the Odin Teatret, Holstebro, on 18 April 1988 and then toured Denmark and West Germany before coming to Britain for a further six weeks. It was revived again in October 1988 and toured for a month in Poland. Reviews were generally excellent. The *Independent* described it as: 'a powerful, beautifully orchestrated work, welding together ideas that are quite disturbing – from folkloric rituals to the classical Furies – to arrive at its own strange energy'.[10] The *Guardian* referred to its appeal to women in the audience:

> Some of the visual imagery is spine-tinglingly powerful and the whole show – performed with immense style and some wit by an international company of actresses – is bound to strike a poignant chord with any woman who has tried to balance the demands of her own creative life against the trashy, limited images of womanhood handed down by our culture.[11]

Claire Armistead writing in the *Financial Times* discussed the piece in terms of the overall research project from which it had originated, that of trying to explore the possibility of a uniquely female form of theatre:

> The rescue of women from the male imagination has become an almost obsessive preoccupation of the latterday women's movement. In this instance a Cardiff-based project, under Polish direction, sets about the task with the high seriousness of knights in pursuit of the Holy Grail. That they will fail to complete their mission is part of the tradition; the pursuit is all.
>
> *Nominatae Filiae* is more specifically a collaboration between the theatre research arm of Belgium's Cirque Divers and the Magdalena Project, an international venture which grew out of a three-week women's festival in Wales two years ago. Its mission, broadly speaking, is to pool experience and creativity into the search for themes and variations that are uniquely female.
>
> The first hurdle, which has yet to be successfully negotiated, is to find a language for the undertaking. Here is a piece rich with cultural resonance, which would seem in its own terms to be merely a preamble to the main cause. We are presented with a woman artist painting at the turn of the century, from whose pallette trip dying swans, murderesses and martyrs who speak in many tongues and idioms but who are historically closeted by male stereotypes and preconceptions – a state symbolised by a profusion of picture frames.
>
> There is a Piaf figure in black lace who rasps out her role models (Medea, Roxane . . .) before submitting herself, in tremulous soprano, to a rendition of *La Vie en Rose*: there is a tousle-haired artist's model, who announces proudly that she specialises in suicide poses before dashing herself again and again to the floor. It is only at the very end of the reverie that the

archetypes gather behind the largest of the picture frames and collectively claw their way out.

This single, barbaric concept gives a sudden, breathtaking coherence to a tapestry of images that is stitched together by director Zofia Kalinska in patterns that become increasingly wild.[12]

The success of *Nominatae Filiae* as a performance is indubitable, and the testimonies of those concerned show that the working experience was an enriching one for all the women involved. The enthusiastic reviews were an adequate reward for the weeks of frustration in the early stages of the work and the frenetic activity of the final month, when the designer Zofia de Inez Lewzuk arrived from Poland and began work on the costumes and set.

But the question of the uniqueness of the female experience and its articulation in terms of theatre remained a vexed one. During the three months of work, Zofia Kalinska complained at being constantly pushed back into what she termed a 'masculine' directorial position, where the performers demanded to be told what to do. She, for her part, kept insisting that they follow their own working pattern in exploring their relationships with the chosen archetypes, instead of having a series of demands placed on them by another person. These two very different perspectives often led to clashes, and in the moments of conflict the terminology used by both director and performers was that of the mother–daughter relationship.

The Aradeo workshop failed to discuss one aspect of women's theatre work that recurred in the *Nominatae Filiae* rehearsals, in much the same way as it had recurred in other Magdalena meetings – the impulse felt by many women to 'mother', to 'enable', to 'over-protect' one another as a kind of compensation for what was perceived as the discrimination women endure in the world of men. Time and again discussion groups would take up the question of female solidarity, the need for harmony amongst women, the need for a supportive environment. Both Zofia Kalinska and Susan Bassnett had wanted to challenge such assumptions in their work and investigate instead the violence and the destructive urges which are present in women just as they are in men. This, they felt, was a more honest position and one which could be exploded in view of the growth of women's self-confidence and public power during the decades of the women's movement. The equation of woman with caring and ma-

30. Nominatae Filiae: *Adele Saleem as Salome*

ternal instincts was one which they felt should be challenged, but despite the images of strength and power that the final performance managed to convey, the fundamental question was not tackled at all. The working method within the company consisting entirely of women was not notably different from that of any other company regardless of sex, except for the fact that the tensions between director and performers were articulated in other terms. Zofia Kalinska's desire to find a new way of collaborative working foundered on the need felt by the performers to work within the security of a structured

directorial power system. In the event, she shaped some of the material brought by the performers, but for the most part the performance was the expression of the director's concepts and ideas, in the tradition of director's theatre. *Nominatae Filiae* did not in the end represent a breakthrough into new explicitly female ways of working.

Notes

1. See bibliography for full details.
2. Julia Varley, statement, 3 March 1987.
3. Quotation taken from the document sent to participants, *The Magdalena Project '87: A Woman's Language in Theatre? II*, 4, 5, 6 December.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Julia Varley, document entitled *The Magdalena Project: Siren: A Woman's Voice in Theatre.*
7. Ibid.
8. Maria Antonietta Saracino, 'E di scena Magdalena,' *Noi Donne* (October 1988).
9. Zofia Kalinska, Notes on Directing *Nominatae Filiae*, advance press statement prior to performances, March 1988.
10. Review by Sarah Hennings of productions at the 1988 Glasgow Mayfest, Festival of novel approaches, *The Independent*, 23 May 1988.
11. *The Guardian*, 23 May 1988.
12. *The Financial Times*, 25 May 1988.

IV
The Future for Women's Theatre

In her book, *Feminism and Poetry*, Jan Montefiore struggles with the question of whether there can be a genuinely female poetry written in a female language and concludes that, although there may be poetry of woman-centred sexuality, this does not constitute a new language because 'experience and language do not coincide, and there is nothing gendered about poetic form'.[1] She then adds that whenever women's poetry is looked at closely, it is still always engaged with the same masculine language and symbolism that it aspires to transcend:

> But this oppositional engagement, this struggle to transform inherited meanings, is where the real strength and specificity of women's poetry lies. Certainly, it is true that the notion of a specifically female language and identity is utopian, like that of any female tradition of poetry written without reference to any masculine discourse. But the value of utopias is that they enable us to imagine possibilities of difference for the brute, contingent world. . . .[2]

Jan Montefiore is writing about poetry, but the terms she uses can be equally applicable to theatre. Much of the work carried out at the Magdalena meetings has revolved around the question of 'a woman's language in theatre', and what is meant by that is whether there can be a form of theatre practice that is identifiably female. So far, the conclusions have tended towards the same view as Jan Montefiore – that the tradition of theatre is so strongly male-dominated that there is no clear way forward towards a women's theatre, other than one defined in terms of its content. Theatre forms, whether text-based or

created in other ways, have not so far revealed anything that can be defined as specifically female, and it may be that such an aspiration is as utopian as the aspiration towards a specifically female form of poetic discourse. Nevertheless, the fact that such questions were not even being posed twenty years ago is a sign of how much progress there has been and how far the discussion and exploration has come, since the earliest manifestations of feminist theatre in the late 1960s.

In September 1986, shortly after the first Magdalena meeting, the International School of Theatre Anthropology (ISTA) held a meeting in Holstebro on the topic of 'The Female Role' as represented on the stage in various cultures. Present at that meeting were male and female performers from Europe, China, Japan, India and Bali and a large number of theatre practitioners, writers and anthropologists from all parts of the world. The basic premise of the meeting was to investigate the portrayal of gender roles by performers of both sexes; consequently there were female impersonators of extraordinary skill and Chinese women trained to play male roles, including the magnificent Pei Yan-Ling whose portrayal of a warrior was so exquisite that she received a standing ovation at the end of her workshop demonstration.

In an introductory statement that later appeared as an essay, Eugenio Barba argued that the notion of duality, though fundamental to most societies, does not necessarily contain positive and negative evaluations:

> At the origin, in the period of vulnerability, individual differentiation passes through the negation of the differentiation of the sexes. The field of complementarity dilates. This is seen in the Occident when, in training work on the pre-expressive level, no account is taken of what is masculine and what is feminine, or in the Orient, when an actor explores masculine and feminine roles indiscriminately. The double-edged nature of his particular energy becomes tangibly evident. The balance between the two poles, Animus and Anima, is preserved.
>
> In this context, the Balinese speak of a continual interweaving of Manis and Kras. The Indians speak of Lasya and Tandava. These terms do not refer to women and men or to masculine or feminine qualities, but to Softness and Vigour as flavours of energy. The warrior god, Rama, for example, is often represented in the 'soft' manner: Lasya. In our culture, Anima and Animus refer to the two sides of a pair of scales, a *concordia discors*, an interaction between opposites, which brings to mind the poles of a magnetic field or the tension between body and shadow. It would be arbitrary to particularise them sexually.[3]

31. Nominatae Filiae: *Archtypes passing through the frame*

Except, of course, that societies do particularise the 'soft' and the 'vigorous', and the values that come to be attributed to these qualities tend to be associated with gender roles. This was the problem that came to the fore during the three days of the Holstebro meeting and mirrored the kinds of issues that had been discussed so intensely at Magdalena '86 and have remained on the agenda ever since. Eugenio Barba and the ISTA meeting appeared to be starting from the utopian position of an asexual idea of energy, whereas many of the women present, particularly theatre practitioners, argued that it was impossible to ignore an actor's sex and that any theoretical position on performing must take into account sexual differences.

A basic premise of ISTA work since the early 1980s has been the notion of pre-expressivity. By this is meant what the actor communicates by presence and dynamic energy and consists of what Barba calls 'a heritage of knowledge that is substantially similar in the theatres of all cultures'.[4] This pre-expressive level is also known as the 'biological' level of theatre, and is defined as follows:

> This 'biological' level of the theatre permits us to make an intercultural examination of the various theatrical traditions, not as historically determined systems, but as extra-daily techniques based on a particular use of the actor's energy and manifested in particular styles and forms.
>
> The principles underlying extra-daily technique and use of energy are:
>
> (1) an alteration of balance, resulting in new posture and gait.
> (2) a dilation of muscular tensions according to the dynamics of opposites in relationship
> (3) a consistent inconsistency with respect to the 'arbitrary' rules the actor decides to follow.
>
> The use of these principles result in a new architecture of muscular tones and corporal rhythms which are the basis of the actor's pre-expressivity.[5]

The actor's training, according to this model, is therefore somehow desexualised, and regardless of the sex of the individual and the ways in which the roles of male and female may be perceived in society at large, the biological level of theatre remains a constant meeting point where sexual differentiation can be either ignored or overcome.

But many of the women present at the ISTA meeting did not agree with this view of the actor's training and the actor's role. They argued strongly that focus on the actor's technique of body and voice work should not obscure the wider issues of the social position of both the actor as individual and the roles he or she plays. In many parts of the world women have been forbidden to perform in public; in some cases women have been excluded from the stage after having played on it for centuries; while in other cases they have never been allowed to begin, and consequently female roles have been portrayed by male performers. These historical facts, it was argued, remain on the table despite the idealistic discussions of asexual technique. And, perhaps inevitably, the refusal in Holstebro to acknowledge that

social dimension resulted in accusations of discrimination against women, the suggestion that the theory of pre-expressivity as asexual was male-determined.

It is difficult not to feel some sympathy with this point of view. On the one hand, it would be grossly over-simplistic to assume that Eugenio Barba's notion of pre-expressivity is sexist, but on the other, it does fail to take into account the fact that despite training from a very early age, male and female bodies undergo a series of biological changes that cannot but have an impact on the physical results. Puberty for men and for women is a time of enormous change, but the great difference between the sexes is that after puberty women menstruate, and consequently their biological time-clock is altered in ways that men cannot imagine. A performer may rise above her monthly period pains and produce marvellous work regardless, but she will still be aware of those physical changes, controlled by hormonal alterations, and will therefore have to make a conscious effort to try to blot them out of her awareness if that is how she chooses to work. In planning the Magdalena meeting on motherhood at Aradeo, Silvia Ricciardelli chose to deal with precisely one such issue: the way in which the possibility of child-bearing weighs on the life and training of the female performer.

Eugenio Barba's seminal work on acting and the research of the ISTA group has been deemed to be of great value throughout the world by large numbers of actors in and out of traditional theatres. But it was not until 1986, the year of the first Magdalena, that women began to ask questions, and the challenge mounted to his theory of pre-expressivity by women with an alternative viewpoint is an important stage in the development of work in women's theatre. It may still not be possible to say precisely what a women's theatre language might be, but it does seem to be possible to say what it is not and to identify flaws in the theories of even the most experienced and sympathetic men in the theatre world.

Discussing the tradition of the *onnagata*, the Japanese male actor portraying female roles, Jan Kott makes an extraordinary statement about representations of femininity on stage:

> If one asks an actress to portray a woman, to walk like a woman, to drink tea like a woman, she will be astonished and will ask: 'But which woman?'. In fact, femininity only exists in the eyes of men, just as blackness only exists for whites. The

onnagata portrays femininity to a much greater degree than if the actor was a woman. His femininity is the result of study by generations of actors, and perhaps even more importantly, generations of painters. It is at one and the same time magical and a joke, adoration and humiliation, idealization and desire. It is a femininity doubly ambiguous, seen through the eyes of a man and played by a man. An actress who undresses on stage plays a woman who is undressing. When the strip-tease is over, she has nothing on. First she was almost nude, but now she is only nude and can only exhibit herself.

It is as Obrasov said: 'With a box of matches one can show everything which is not a box of matches. But the box itself can only be exhibited'.[6]

In proposing the theory that woman is the Other, that she comes into existence only when perceived by men, Jan Kott follows the old Existentialist view of the dichotomy between the sexes. But by suggesting that woman cannot perform except as herself and that femininity on stage can only be ideally represented by a man, Kott ends up making a statement remarkable for its discrimination. The logical counter-argument would surely be that if femininity can only be represented by a male performer, masculinity could only be represented by a female performer, and yet there is nothing in the history of representation, whether pictorial, sculptural or theatrical, that would confirm this hypothesis. Nor have women performers ever sought to do such a thing on any scale (there are certain traditions of female cross-dressing in some forms of theatre, but always as a minority interest). Jan Kott's suggestion reveals the magnitude of the problem facing women who are endeavouring to create their own form of theatre. For in his view, that is *a priori* an impossibility. Woman, like Obrasov's emblematic box of matches, can only represent herself, can only be exhibited.

If a leading theatre critic can make such statements, there is clearly still a great deal of groundwork to be done. Those women who are endeavouring to create a women's theatre have to take on board the views of the Jan Kotts of the world. However much such opinions may be disliked, they cannot be ignored because of their grounding in tradition and in audience expectations. The strength of women, the struggle for a voice and a language, the complex processes of women's artistic production, all the issues that preoccupy women

theatre practitioners today are completely absent from Jan Kott's vision of women's theatrical presence, in which femininity is an external set of signs perceivable only by men and not an intrinsic value system belonging primarily to women.

The work of the Magdalena Project so far has been that of widening areas of debate and bringing out into the open problems that are both practical and theoretical. The questions posed in the first Magdalena, which tended to be more abstract, have gradually shifted as the context has altered, and the range of people involved has widened. No longer only concerned with experimental theatre, the Magdalena Project now has links with many kinds of theatre and links also with educational establishments. The Inroads project, for example, was designed to introduce some of the ideas of Magdalena into schools. This project has not materialised, but instead the Write On project, designed particularly for younger women interested in writing and performing, took place during the last week of February 1989. The programme of workshops is constantly being enlarged. In short, the scope of the Magdalena Project is now considerably larger than was ever dreamed of when plans were first laid down for a meeting of women interested in theatre.

What is also apparent is that the Magdalena meetings have offered such women a unique opportunity to meet and share their experiences. Sometimes those meetings have functioned as a support group, as a consciousness-raising group or as a forum where conflicting opinions can be voiced among women, but always as a focal point for women sharing a common interest. Time and again comments from participants have stressed the rarity of such encounters and the value of having them.

What the Magdalena Project has done so far is to open doors that many women had previously either never seen or had felt were closed to them. As the Project increases in size and in complexity, it will no doubt encompass even more. Principal on the agenda, now that women in theatre can feel assured that they do have their own organisation and consequently a platform from which to speak more loudly, is the need to rediscover their own history. As Joan Kelly, the late feminist historian puts it, the dual goal of women's history is to 'restore women to history and to restore our history to women'.[7] In the theatre, the history of women has been ignored or minimalised for so long that it is hardly surprising that many women working in theatre today have a sense of uneasiness because they are unaware of

their own past. Now perhaps, as women come together to share techniques and traditions and to exchange ideas and histories, they will begin also to turn to their own heritage. The 1992 Magdalena meeting that is being planned in Colombia will focus on exactly this question. It seems, finally, that as the twentieth century draws to a close, the future of women's theatre, revitalised by a rediscovery of its own history, has never looked brighter.

32. *Zofia Kalinska directing* Nominatae Filiae

Notes

1. Jan Montefiore, *Feminism and Poetry, Language, Experience, Identity in Women's Writing* (London, Pandora, 1987), p. 178.

2. Ibid., p. 179.

3. Eugenio Barba, 'The Actor's Energy: Male–Female versus Animus–Anima,' *New Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. III, No. 11 (August 1987), pp. 237–41.

4. Eugenio Barba, document for The Female Role, ISTA Congress, 17–22 September 1986.

5. Ibid.

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7. Joan Kelly, *Women, History and Theory* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 1.

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